

EMBASSY SUCCESSES

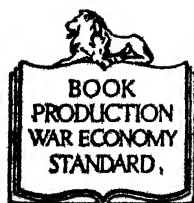
II

1945 - 1946

National Velvet
Skipper Next to God
No Room at the Inn

LONDON

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Foreword

by

ANTHONY HAWTREY

I AM very happy to see the publication of *Embassy Successes of 1945-1946* (I and II) for many reasons

Two years ago, our theatre was derelict—an early victim of German bombing. At mid-summer 1944, however, we decided to begin the job of resurrection—flying-bombs or no flying-bombs

When I say “We”, I am referring to a large number of friends and acquaintances who, by entirely voluntary labour at a very difficult time, made the restoration of the Embassy Theatre possible

It was absolutely due to their efforts that we were able to reopen the theatre to the public as early as January 1945—and I only wish that it were possible for me to thank everyone concerned, publicly

Since then, we have presented at the Embassy twenty new plays, of widely-differing types. Selecting the plays to fill these two volumes was no easy task—there were so many which we wanted to include!

I am not going to say that the six which we did finally choose are necessarily the best which we have done at our theatre—but I do think that the collection is truly representative of the work which we are trying to do, and that each one of the six is an exceptionally good play to read.

The two biggest successes by commercial standards in these books are, of course, *No Room at the Inn*, and *Worm's Eye View*, which, as I write, are filling the Winter Garden and Whitehall Theatres, respectively.

Father Malachy's Miracle and *Zoo in Silesia*, on the other hand, were artistic successes, which, for various reasons, did not break box-office records at the Embassy.

National Velvet was one of the most charming plays we have done, while Jan de Hartog's *Skipper Next to God* was remarkable for its sincerity.

If I were forced to name a favourite among this collection, I may say, quite frankly, that I should choose *No Room at the Inn*. I consider

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Miss Joan Temple's timely and full-blooded drama of what *can* happen to child evacuees in war-time to be one of the most perfectly-constructed plays of recent years, as well as being a most exciting play to produce, and one with enormous scope for a producer

One curious thing about *No Room at the Inn* is that I think it is the only play I have ever been connected with in which nothing ever went wrong, from the first rehearsal to the opening night

I cannot express sufficient admiration for Freda Jackson's magnificent and unvarying performance in the arduous part of the frightening Mrs Voray, whose calculated and heartless behaviour towards the evacuee children under her charge forms the play's focal situation

I have, too, a very soft spot for *Father Malachy's Miracle* Adapted by Brian Doherty from Bruce Marshall's novel of the same name, this was the play which really put us on the London theatrical map It was a great prestige success, and attracted a remarkable amount of press and public comment, most of it extremely favourable.

Father Malachy's Miracle is a large-scale play, with thirty-five characters and four sets, and one or two people accused us of trying to do too much within the confines of the 700-seater Embassy It seems to me that we ought, occasionally, to be ambitious

The 72-year-old Irish actor, W G Fay, gave, I thought, a wonderful performance as the Catholic priest whose adventures in a tough Edinburgh dance-hall provide the amusing background to the play, which Brian Doherty adapted so deftly.

Father Malachy's Miracle, which had been seen previously in New York with some success, was at one time due to transfer to a West-End theatre, but owing to "circumstances", this never materialised. However, I have every intention of reviving it at some future date, as I am sure that it is a play of such worth that it deserves a wider audience than it has yet had in this country

Another play which I should like to see done again is *Zoo in Silesia*, Richard Pollock's detailed and truthful picture of prisoner-of-war life, in which that first-rate actor, Hugh Williams, chose to make his return to the stage after an absence of six years.

I have never been able to understand the reception given to this play by the London critics, the majority of whom wrote to the effect that they did not believe a word of it, despite the fact that the producer, Wallace Douglas, had been a prisoner-of-war, as well as the author.

When *Zoo in Silesia* went to Bristol, the reverse happened, the play received an ovation, and the critics there acclaimed it for what I feel it is—"real life, raw life—written with a fine sense of the theatre".

I recommend careful reading of *Zoo in Silesia*. The author ostensibly deals with a world surrounded by barbed wire, but if you look closely

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enough, I think you will realise that he is also dealing very much with our world. The analogy is there.

For the production of every play there is a right and a wrong moment, and I think it likely that we chose the wrong one for *Zoo in Silesia*.

Another play with a great deal more depth in it than is generally realised is R. F. Delderfield's *Worm's Eye View*, which has been convulsing (I believe that is the word) audiences at the Whitehall Theatre for many months, and will probably go on doing so for many months to come.

On the face of it a farcical comedy of low genre, *Worm's Eye View* has some direct and forceful things to say about the way some of our troops were treated some of the time in some of the billets.

At cursory examination, it would be difficult to name two plays more different than *Worm's Eye View* and *No Room at the Inn*. A closer inspection might, perhaps, show that, radically, they have many points of similarity. It is simply a question of treatment!

Worm's Eye View, in any case, is a thoroughly workmanlike comedy, well-constructed, full of realistic dialogue and characterisation, and I am delighted to see the success which it has made.

R. F. Delderfield, its author, has written several serious plays so extremely good which have failed to make any money or attract much attention, that one admires him all the more for being able to write a first-rate comedy to pulverise the box-office.

Worm's Eye View was first presented at the Embassy in conjunction with *Skipper Next to God*, as part of an experiment for running two plays each night, in an attempt to combat the shortage of theatres.

The idea was not entirely successful, owing to the unwillingness of present-day audiences to attend a show beginning later than eight o'clock in the evening, and it is possible that the extremely serious *Skipper Next to God* suffered, in consequence.

This play, written with a sort of smouldering fervour by a young Dutchman, Jan de Hartog—he also played the principal part—deals with the problem of Jewish refugees, the author finding his inspiration in an actual case, around which he built his ideas on the subject, which were considerable.

De Hartog unfolds his case for the Jews with immense sincerity and compassion through the eyes and the mind of a fanatically religious young sea-captain, who is determined to land his boatload of unwanted human cargo somewhere along the American coastline. The play traces his efforts to do this, in the face of inhuman bureaucratic opposition.

The author of *Skipper Next to God* had a very great deal to say on a very large subject, and he said all of it with very great feeling—but I have always thought that had he been content to say just a little bit

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less, his play would have been improved—although I have never, for one moment, regretted doing it at our theatre

The remaining play in these volumes, *National Velvet*, Enid Bagnold's own adaptation from her famous novel, and film, is, I think, a beautifully-written and entirely charming play

This story of a butcher's daughter, crazy about horses, who wins "The Piebald" in a shilling raffle, and how she eventually rides the horse to victory in the Grand National, is, I suppose, fundamentally ridiculous—but, personally, I think this criticism away from the point

Nearly all stories, boiled down, are absurd—it is surely the treatment that matters. I think that Miss Bagnold's characters are so warm, so human, and her dialogue so utterly delightful, that her story becomes entirely convincing

A certain number of people, I believe, would not come and see the play because they thought that it would be impossible to present the Grand National adequately on the stage. I think that anyone who did see our production will agree that the way this *was* done, obliquely, by means of a wireless set in the jockeys' changing-room, was most effective and extremely exciting

I believe *National Velvet*—and the other plays in these books—to be good, interesting "theatre".

People often ask me, "What is your policy at the Embassy?" The answer is simple. Our policy is this

To present new plays dealing with aspects of today's world—in terms of *entertainment*. If these plays are written by new playwrights, so much the better

I am aware that the English theatre cannot properly thrive unless there is a constant supply of fresh dramatists. At the Embassy, we shall always do everything in our power to foster this supply

ANTHONY HAWTREY

*Swiss Cottage,
London, N W 3
Sept, 1946*

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NATIONAL VELVET

BY

Enid Bagnold

C A S T

Characters in order of their appearance.

MI TAYLOR	Edward Chapman
MEREDITH BROWN	Josephine Stuart
MR BROWN	Noel Morris
EDWINA BROWN	Mary Mackenzie
VELVET BROWN	Tilsa Page
MRS BROWN	Marie Lohr
TEDDY	Peter Bell
DONALD BROWN	David De Saram
THE PROFESSOR	Richard Littledale
FIRST JOCKEY	Michael Bilton
SECOND JOCKEY	Michael Conry
LAD	Bernard Leader
THIRD JOCKEY	Brian Codd
FIRST ANNOUNCER	Tom Macaulay
SECOND ANNOUNCER	Richard Pollock
DISHER	John Chapman
DOCTOR	Peter Murray
A MAN .	Trevor Ward
CLERK OF THE COURSE	Shaun Sutton
LORD TUNMARSH	George Butler
MITS SCREIBER	Tom Macaulay
CAPTAIN LITTLE	Michael Bilton
SIMKIN	Sidney Monckton

First presented at the Embassy Theatre on Saturday, April 20th, 1946
Produced by ANTHONY HAWTREY

All applications for performing rights in this play should be addressed
to the author's agents, Messrs Joan Ling, Ltd, Gloucester House,
Charing Cross Road, W C 2

NATIONAL VELVET

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place at a date before the ruling was changed that allowed a horse to compete in the Grand National that had not raced previously.

ACT I

Scene 1 Outside the Browns' cottage in Sussex August.

Scene 2 The same The next day

Scene 3 The same Thirteen months later September

Interval

ACT II

Scene 1 The living-room of the Browns' cottage Early December.

Scene 2 The same The day before the Grand National.

Scene 3 The jockeys' changing room at Aintree The next day

Interval

ACT III

Scene 1 The board-room at Weatherby's Two days later.

Scene 2 The living-room A few days later.

Author's Note —If possible the play should be played by and for grown-up people. Velvet, especially, is wistful, delicate, hallucinated, without any childish tricks.

NATIONAL VELVET

Act One: Scene I

The half-garden yard of a butcher-slaughterer's white-painted cottage-front by the sea, and under the Downs The sea is not shown

The cottage-front is practically all window—an exceptionally low wide window with a broad sill, over which most of the action takes place Within the living-room one can see a dresser, and another window giving onto the back of the cottage, but obscured by glass shelves on which are crowded pots of growing and trailing flowers, lobelia, cactus, canariensis, so this small crowded window serves to give a glowing depth to the room

Under the broad window, inside, is a flap which is pulled up, on which dinner is laid at meal-time.

On the dresser is VELVET'S shell box in which she keeps her paper horses. A cloth, a knife-box, a tray of cutlery and a pile of plates are kept within and are used when the time comes to lay a meal

THE YARD *The cottage, being at an angle, there is room only for one more building on the right This is the stable of Miss Ada, the pony It has an old double door, made of heavy eight inch planks, with cross-planks v-wise across each door, and a horizontal plank ten inches from the floor across the bottom portion, so that a child can stand on the cross-plank to look over into the stable. The upper door has a couple of old iron hooks on it, from which hangs a halter or bridle. A horse-shoe is nailed on the door As the top half of the door is permanently hooked open these things should be fastened to the inside.*

This stable gives access, as a short-cut to the street, and it is a constant annoyance to MI that straw is kicked into the yard by those passing through it. When the curtain is raised there should be a little straw in the yard outside the stable door

The slaughter-house door on the Right, between the stable door and the house-wall. On the Left is a patch of white-painted fencing, with a swing garden gate.

NATIONAL VELVET

On the Left, backstage, is a gap between the cottage-porch (which only just shows, the cottage being at an angle) and the end of the fence. This gap shows a steep chalk path mounting up to the Downs. Bordering the path are cobbled cottages. On the back curtain is painted the rounded humped Downs, in one case rising right to the eye-line, and in another, at the top of the path, sky can be seen. The effect should be that the cottage is placed right beneath a steep Down, and the path up should be steep

On the Left of the big window, and half under it, is a big weathered oak trestle table, very solid and narrow, with a leg at one end and an upright barrel at the other (where the leg has been broken and been taken away), with similar low narrow bench-seat in front of it and the whole length of it. Under the window is an ex-kitchen chair with the back still on, but broken, grey with weathering. Near the stable door is an upturned box (MI'S seat)

On the Right, backstage, is JACOB'S kennel, with his chain fastened to a staple but now flung up over the roof of the kennel

Details about the yard: a small broken hen-coop, with slats, under the fence. A horse-collar (for cart) propped near stable door. A fork near the stable door. A box-shaped wire rat-cage (which MI is cleaning when the curtain goes up). Rags on window-sill and by MI'S box. Brasso on the window-sill

A stable brush against wall, with very few hairs left in it. A full bucket of water stands by wall. A striped hand towel of MI'S hangs on a nail

EDWINA'S bedroom (in fact all their bedrooms) can be reached from the yard only by going round and into porch. It might be that the bottom six inches of her windows could show, without injuring the line of sight.

TIME *Seven o'clock on a summer's evening (August).*

When the CURTAIN GOES UP . . . MI TAYLOR—shirt, no collar, (shirt buttoned up), old coat hanging by a nail on stable wall behind him, leather belt, very old trousers with patch . . . what he calls his "mucking out" trousers, no tie of course, that is hanging with the coat, red curling hair sticking up in the air—is sitting on the upturned box. Right, near the stable wall, cleaning out a large wire rat-cage, box-type, with spring inside. He is whistling through his teeth.

MEREDITH—fifteen years, in a blue cotton dress, with a cardigan tied by its arms round her waist, (or on these lines) has a large canary-breeding cage, rusty and old, and empty (she has taken out the canaries to clean it) on the trestle table. She has pulled out the tray and is scraping it with a twig, or a bit of firewood. Bits of sand drop off it. The dirty little water and seed bowls are on the table beside the cage.

NATIONAL VELVET

She empties the water out of the drinking bowl and picks up the corner of her skirt to wipe it out

MI (*without looking up* . *always sees everything through his head*)
Stop that Take a rag

Throws her one from beside him She picks it up obediently and cleans the bowl

MEREDITH M₁.

Silence again

M₁

MI I'm here.

MEREDITH I've given the cock canary cod liver oil

MI (*without looking up*) I can smell you from here

MEREDITH It says in the book "give it to mating birds" (*continuing to clean*)

MI Yours aren't mating

MEREDITH It says "Cod liver oil gives vitality". You've got to be vital to mate. (*Struck by sudden thought*) Or should I have given it to the hen?

MI (*tersely*) . Cock before. Hen after

Enter MR BROWN from Left—by fence gate

He is a thin, sporting-looking man, about fifty, with a hard, lean face, a yellowing, well-cut, small-check suit on, the trousers thrust into long gum-boots. He carries a blue boiler suit or apron over his arm His collar is off.

MR. BROWN *wears an old cap pulled well on and rather jauntily worn*

MI *does not get up*

MR BROWN (*pausing over M₁*) . Bin over to Worthing?

MI : I have.

MR. BROWN . Got that freezing-machine catalogue for me?

MI . Shops shut again.

MR. BROWN : Don't you ever learn the shut-shop day in Worthing? Whad'yer do then?

MI (*looking up for the first time*) : Had three teeth took out. Dentist was all there was open.

MEREDITH (*coming over, thrilled*) . Oh M₁, where?

NATIONAL VELVET

MI *opens his mouth wide and points to his bloody wound with his thumb*

MR BROWN (*taking down the blue and white striped apron, giving it a good shake to get the dust off it, passing the loop over his head*) You oughter eat pap for it It's pulpy

MI S'got to learn to harden What time you expecting them half-dozen ?

MR BROWN (*passing the black tapes round his waist and beginning to tie them in front*) What ? Them sheep ? I'm going through for 'em now I'll want you after supper

Goes to stable door and lays his hand on the door, turns and says reflectively.

Poor lot those last sheep we had It's the drought Ribby, they were I had three complaints at the shop

MI Dog's bin racin' 'em

MR BROWN (*going through door into stable*) I'll dog 'im *Git over !* (*Re-appearing at stable door and speaking over it*) This pony's took to eating her bedding.

MI Everything she sees is chewing gum to Miss Ada. She's bored

Mr Brown disappears

MEREDITH (*after a pause*) How old is she, Mi ?

MI She's twenty-one An' she's all you got, an' you gotta put up with her

Silence.

MEREDITH (*scraping a perch*) : Where's Velvet ?

MI How should I know ?

MEREDITH You always know where Velvet is (*Looking round at kennel*) Whur's Jacob ?

MI (*with venom*) · After they bitches

MEREDITH Seem bad this August

MI (*putting down his cleaning and looking up, the question of Jacob always stirs him*) What ? Bitches ? Terrible they are. Crown's got one. An' Ede's got one. That Jacob he . . .

Words fail him He shakes his fist at the kennel.

MEREDITH : Ede ? Farmer Ede ? He . . .

MI (*softly*) : Blast an' . . . blast an' . . . hell. (*He has caught his finger in the rat cage*)

NATIONAL VELVET

MEREDITH (*after briefly glancing at him*). Ede's having trouble with his piebald horse Got away again this morning Did you hear it in the street?

MI (*sucking his finger crossly*). Everybody heard it All the women was running with their prams.

MEREDITH I saw it It galloped It looked lovely.

MI Lovely my foot It'll kill someone Then Ede'll look queer.

MEREDITH. Why does it do it?

MI Don't ask me. Ede'd no business to buy it if he can't keep it to himself

MEREDITH Where's Edwina?

MI (*still cross*) Have you ever noticed? Yor talk's all questions.

Silence. MEREDITH, *unperturbed, is wiping the thin bars up and down with the rag*

MEREDITH (*looking round to see no one is listening*) Becos—she's going with Teddy (*In a soft portentous voice*)

Immediately EDWINA appears at the window. She is slight and fair, the eldest, about seventeen She is very angry She wears a pretty shirt and skirt

EDWINA (*leaning over the window sill, holding in one hand a small nail-varnish brush and in the other a tiny bottle*) I heard you! How dare you! How dare you talk about me, Merry!

MEREDITH (*undisturbed, with innocent wonder*) You're . painting your nails!

EDWINA That's my business! (*Sitting on the low sill she swings her slim legs over and stands in the yard, still holding the bottle and brush. indignant*) Mi! Isn't it my business?

MI (*looking at her*). Yes, it is

MEREDITH (*outraged*). That she should red her nails!

MI. You gotta let people grow *when* they grow.

EDWINA (*flaunting*): Thank you (*Turns to the porch.*) I'm going upstairs. To do my toes as well.

Exit.

MEREDITH (*watching her depart—then soberly to Mi*): You let us all down!

MI: I want no advice from you. There's other people got to mate besides your canaries.

NATIONAL VELVET

MEREDITH (*horrified*) Mate! Edwina! (*Staring aghast up at the top window*)

MI: All I say is keep your tongue off people that's older than yourself Everything's got to come to you

MEREDITH (*after a moment's pause, as she wipes*) Nothing'll come to me an' Velvet Not like that

MI What's wrong with Teddy then—if Edwina likes him?

MEREDITH Teddy? Nothing wrong with Teddy It's the way Edwina acts.

MI (*laying his cage down and putting his hands on his knees and looking full at Meredith*) See here, Meredith

She turns round

Edwina acts funny

MEREDITH Yes, she does

MI (*meaningly*) And don't Velvet act funny?

MEREDITH Velvet!

MI What does your father think about them paper horses that Velvet carries about—making believe they're real ones, hitting her legs, and cantering and rubbing 'em down so's the paper gets all fluffy, an' making little saddles and bridles out of cotton? What does he make of all that? You an' I know what she's after But what does he make of it?

MEREDITH (*slowly*) Well I suppose . . . he can't understand it

MI. No Nor can't you understand Edwina neither. We all act funny when you look at it. Life is a private thing

MEREDITH But, Mi. Edwina is turning into a sort of enemy!

MI (*portentously, wagging his finger*): It's because she's in love That's what I wanted to tell you Take it from me It turns you. Like drink.

Enter VELVET, Left, through gate She is thin, like a strange boy, like Joan of Arc She has a sickly, inspired appearance. She is bare-foot, carrying her shoes in her hand, and her feet are black with slime to the ankles Her teeth protrude and she wears a metal band A small cutting whip is in her hand with the shoes. In her other hand she carries a tiny object in front of her. It is a small paper horse, cut from The Tatler.

VELVET (*a little breathless*) His hocks were puffy. I stood him in the pond. Whose turn to lay supper?

MEREDITH. Mine.

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET Terrible stuff in the pond (*Looking down at her ankles*)
Spawn

MRS BROWN *appears at the window, large, majestic, silent*
I stood five minutes

MEREDITH It couldn't be spawn Not in August

MRS BROWN Time to lay Wipe your feet, Velvet

Exits inside past window Left

*Velvet puts down her shoes and begins to draw her big handkerchief
out of her pocket*

(*Repassing the window*) Not with your handkerchief Take a rubber
Exit inside Right

MI · Not one o' my rubbers you don't!

VELVET (*going to window, taking the old rag off the window sill, and
calling inside the room*) · Mother! Give me my shell box, Mother!

MRS BROWN *reappears, takes a small box from dresser, and hands it
to VELVET MRS BROWN again disappears. VELVET takes the shell
box and sits on the grass inside the chains, lays box beside her, little
paper horse on ground, and wipes her ankles.*

MEREDITH *carries the cage away Left, and while VELVET talks to
MI, reappears to collect the cleaning things and the Brasso off the
window sill*

(*After wiping her feet taking up the horse*) · He has a high action.
A lovely show canter, but a difficult trot

She rubs the horse delicately with her finger in circles as she speaks.

MI (*rising, and feeling in his pockets, brings out something*) I found
yer a picture (*Walks across to her holding out the paper scrap*) Know
who that is?

VELVET (*looking up*) · What is it?

MI From a book in the Lending Library

VELVET Did you tear it out?

MI: That's my business.

VELVET: Who is it, Mi?

MI: S'Manifest. Won the National. '99 and '97

VELVET: Oh . . . Mi An' it's a left-facing one too!

MI (*disgusted*): How d'you mean . . . a left-facing one?

VELVET: Well, you see (*holding up her right hand with her own paper
horse in it*) if it's a left-facing one I can hold it in me right with me

NATIONAL VELVET

whip in my left Makes it easier If only it was on thick paper, Mi—
a front page on thick shiny paper

MI (*throwing the picture onto Velvet's lap and walking away*) You
can have it

VELVET (*poring intently over the picture and taking no notice of his
remark*) Looks too clever Looks too knowing

MI (*turning sharply*) Ah aah! He was too clever But he won
all the same

MEREDITH (*who is passing her with Brasso*) Shouldn't a horse be
clever? To win the National?

MI (*contemptuous*) Jumpin' thirty jumps? And he did that course
eight times Greatest National horse ever was Why he won it twice!

MEREDITH (*pausing as she goes out*) Oh!

MI (*speaking after her as she goes out*). 'Tisn' everything to be clever.
S'more important to .

But she has gone.

VELVET To what, Mi?

MI T'ave (*pats his stomach*) 'eart Does yer mother look know-
ing? Does she look clever?

VELVET (*astonished*) Mother?

MI No An' she don't An' that's why she swum the Channel like
she did Dad said when he first got down to her training, "She keeps
'er brains in 'er heart An' that's where they ought ter be An' a man
or woman who does that's one in a million an' 'as got my backing."
An' 'e backed her An' she fetched up over at Calais Against a storm.
Breaststroke An' what a whale! She don't think, yer mother. She
don't think at all She does it instinctive You can never beat that
kind For why? For you never know how much more they've got
left to beat you with

MRS BROWN (*appears again at window softly*) Hold your tongue,
Mi, will you?

MI (*unperturbed*) Yes, ma'am

She contemplates him a moment, then exits.

MI, *jerking his thumb after her with a grin, gives a gentle whistle
through his teeth He picks up his stable brush. He brushes up a few
wisps of straw that have appeared from Miss Ada's stable since Mr.
Brown went through.*

VELVET (*dreamily*): That brush's got no hairs on it.

NATIONAL VELVET

MI (*giving her a look*) Got hairs enough for me When I use a thing I don't like no sauce

VELVET (*leaning back on the grass on her elbows*) That wasn't sauce
(*After a pause, looking at him*) D'you ever have strange feelings, Mi?

MI (*not pausing*) No

VELVET Yes, you do Everybody does

MI Speak for yourself

VELVET Well, I have strange feelings Sometimes I think Mother's Almighty God

MI (*stopping brushing · severely*) Blasphemy

VELVET Where you were brought up did they teach you all you know?

MI (*picking up his brush and examining the hairs and picking straws out of them laconically*) Learnt it since

VELVET I thought so (*Jumps up suddenly and goes towards the stable door*)

MI (*with sudden energetic reminiscence to his brush*) . . an' haven't I had reason to?

VELVET (*turning at stable door and facing him*): Reason to what?

MI . Reason to learn Up an' down the country as I've been.

VELVET (*breathless, egging him on*) You never tell us anything, Mi! Why did you leave your Dad?

MI (*unwontedly communicative still to his brush*) I couldn't swim I couldn't bear the sea An' my old man carried on terrible. Being a swimming trainer I suppose he had his pride. 'N 'e wouldn't leave me alone I ran away in the end. That was before he found your mother an' trained her.

VELVET . But it's the sea . . down here

MI . Yea . . . funny An' that's how it's turned out I went up North at first and I did this an' that. I was all round the racecourses mostly Doesn't take me much to live I walked from here an' there an' I landed up at Lews fer the races an' did a job fer yer father on market day. Then he asked me to come over here for a bit an' help with the sheep in the slaughter house . . an' then I saw that yer Ma was my old man's Araminty. So I stayed.

VELVET (*laying her hand on the stable door*) But Mi .

MI ; An' that's enough

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET *looks at him a moment, then turns and puts her hand on the latch of the stable door to open it*

An' no you don't! Take yer hand off that If you want to pug that pony you can do it over the top I'll have no one but yer father dragging straw out all over the yard!

VELVET *(standing on the cross-bar and leaning into the stable)* Hi, Miss Ada I gotta n'apple for you

MI You'll make her loose, all those apples you give 'er

VELVET She never gets loose She's not that kind Miss Ada! *(Holding her hand inside)*

She jumps down again, wiping one palm on the other to dry it after the pony's mouth

(Change of mood desolately) Oh, Mi

MI What is it then?

VELVET *(almost piteously)* You can't have everything you want, can you?

MI *(looking at her)* You can't

VELVET *(holding out her thin hands and moving her fingers about)* I don't blame Miss Ada I don't blame her But I dream of something that answers me back I tell you something . Mi . What I dreamt last night

MI *(not looking at her, at work on whatever he is doing)* Go on then

VELVET *(uncertainly)* I dreamt of a stable I walked up the middle of it. There was horses both sides I walked up it an' . I could choose. There were bays 'N' browns, 'n' their manes hanging like silk I could see as they turned their heads to look at me They liked the sound of me I dreamt I chose I dreamt I rode on one an' it was mine an' as I rode it knew me, knew the way my fingers . said its name . . on the reins . . are you laughing, Mi?

MI : No

VELVET . because *(twitching her fingers and holding her hands as though the reins were running through them . . . thumbs up and fingers curled)* I know you can talk to a horse that way—

MI : Much chance you've had!

VELVET *(with a glance at the stable)* . Poor Miss Ada! She was here before I was born. I've always known her. She's like . . like the rooms of the house. 'N' my bed. Of course I love her. But she does everything she can against me She . . . she . . . You said you could get

NATIONAL VELVET

blood out of a stone if you wanted it enough But you can't She's too old

MI She's twenty-one, yer father says An' turned sour All pony-mares turn sour Now a horse, mare or gelding, that's a different thing, Velvet You believe me—when you get a horse you'll know it Tell you what, Velvet!

VELVET What?

MI (*pointing with his thumb to the little shell box on the grass*) Them paper horses is worth more to you than that pony!

VELVET *looks wonderingly at the box, then at MI. She walks over to the box and picks it up, takes it over to the trestle table and tips out the horses*

(*Following her and leaning against the table*) What's the use o' talking about that pony when what you got in your head is (*impressively*) blood?

VELVET (*startled*) Blood?

MI Blood (*Pointing down to the pile of little horses*) Blood in them horses that counts

VELVET (*jumping herself up onto the table and holding up one of the horses*) I galloped this one in the dark last night After supper. He never put a foot wrong. Somehow you can *trust* a horse like that.

MI: That's what I say it's blood that counts.

VELVET (*her hand to her mouth, and taking out her plate*) I ride him short I need a saddle with knee flaps

MI Put your plate in again Your father'll catch you He'll be coming through to supper

VELVET (*examining the plate*): 'S'bent a bit It's a hell plate . . . I'll keep it out just a moment.

MI You stick to them horses and don't fret about the pony. You'll get what you want

VELVET (*looking down at them*): But . . . in a way . . . they're only paper

MI. Velvet! Don't you lose your faith! Paper! (*With a big gesture at the horses*) An' you talking of them big like they was in a book. Merry and me . . . the way we listen when you come back from your rides! Think of the names of 'em! Think what they mean, an' what's behind 'em! Lottery an' Jerry M an' Bunter an' the Colonel an' Tipperary Tim and Grakle an' the Lamb Them's Grand National winners. An' there's nothing finer in the world All them horses 'as nigh burst themselves for fame, and they got it, and there they are in

NATIONAL VELVET

a gold roll of honour, and you ride them of an evening up over the Downs! For shame on you! Paper! Where's your faith?

VELVET (*all eyes*) Oh, Mi *What* would I do without you!

MI . An' there'll be a miracle coming to you You'll see

VELVET (*leaning forward*) Will there?

MI There will I've promised it to you Now put yer plate in

MR BROWN (*appearing in the stable door*) She got it out again?

VELVET (*struggling with it with both hands to get in*) It aches me an' aches me

MR BROWN (*coming through, pushing more straw with his feet into the yard, and closing the stable door after him*) Ache or no, argue or no, that plate cost me four poun' ten an' it's solid gold an' in it goes I'm not going to have a chuld like a rabbit if I can help it You three girls got your faces for your fortunes an' none other I've told you often enough

VELVET (*mumbling*) It's got hooked up

MR BROWN (*passing on and through the yard to the porch*) Unhook it then

Exits Left to porch

MEREDITH *appears in the window and pulls up a table flap that hangs inside the window She fixes it, and taking a folded cloth from under her arm she lays the table with the cloth*

VELVET *is picking up the horses and putting them in the box*

MI *goes over to the straw and picks it up in his hand.*

MI . See this? (*Holds up straw.*)

VELVET *looks up*

Yer father can kick this out s'often as he likes It's his right. But I'm not having any of you going through that way The rest of you kin go roun' the back (*Throws straw into stable*)

MEREDITH *continues to put salt, pepper, knives, forks, and a twin-necked oil and vinegar bottle on the table.*

MRS. BROWN, *behind her, puts a tray on the dresser.*

MRS BROWN (*leaning out of window*): You washed yer hands?

VELVET: Just going to.

MRS. BROWN: Get on then.

VELVET: I've not said good night to Donald. S'he asleep?

NATIONAL VELVET

MRS BROWN. His cold's bad I put him off this hour gone
(to MI) You having it in, or you having it out? It's liver an'
bacon

MI You can pass it through the window if you don't mind I'm
waiting for that Jacob

MRS BROWN (*withdrawing*). You can't you like

MI *goes to the fence, stares across it, looks up the steep path, then
whistles shrilly* MR BROWN, *inside the room, his coat on, settles
himself down at table Right, nearest window*

MR BROWN (*leaning out*). Ah . you won't see none of him

MI (*turning*) I won't?

MR BROWN. Got a gal I seen him at Ede's

MI (*vengefully*) I'll give him a gal when he gets back

Goes to bucket, dips hands in, wipes them on towel, and puts on coat

MRS BROWN *appears behind table with a loaded tray*

MRS BROWN (to MI) Give Edwina a call. She's in her room.

MI (*stepping back upstage and looking up at the balcony*). Supper!
Supper! Yer Ma says

EDWINA'S VOICE. Coming

VELVET, MEREDITH, MR BROWN and EDWINA *in a moment .
gather round the table* MRS BROWN *stands up handing out the plates
of already served liver and bacon* She hands one to MR BROWN who
hands it through window to MI. MI sits at trestle table and eats
MRS BROWN sits facing THEY ALL eat MI has his back almost to
them and flings his remarks over his shoulder He keeps his eye on
the fence, for Jacob MI cuts up his whole plateload very small

MR. BROWN (*mouthful*). You ought to a had pap, like I said.

MRS BROWN. What's he got?

MR. BROWN (*back—to her*). Got his teeth took out.

MRS BROWN (*comfortably*): He'll manage.

MR. BROWN: You got that plate in, Velvet?

VELVET (*low*): I got it in. When I come to the radishes . . .

MR. BROWN: You can go without. A radish ain't all the world.

*Enter TEDDY Left, through fence gate. He is a tall golden boy of
nineteen.*

NATIONAL VELVET

TEDDY Hullo, Mi I come to tell . . . Good evening, Mrs Brown
'V' I come the wrong time ? (*He stands by the trestle table, looking in at the window*)

MRS BROWN Had your supper, Teddy ? There's plenty here

TEDDY Had it, thank you I come to tell Velvet really I thought she'd like to take a ticket. They've given me a packet to sell

MI (*looking up from his plate*) Wha's that ? A lottery ?

TEDDY It's that whusky and white piebald of Farmer Ede's Police sergeant's spoke to him again about it coming down the street like it does an' he said he'd raffle it at the Fair tomorrow He reckons he'll make ten pounds

MI. About what he paid for it At Lewes market I was there You bin smart about the tickets

TEDDY They got wads of them at the Post Office, left over from that dance at Christmas We're pushing 'em round tonight an' tomorrow Up till midday S'ony a shilling I thought of Velvet

VELVET (*ecstatically*) Oh thank you, Teddy I've finished, Mother. Can I get up ?

MRS BROWN Take your cocoa

MEREDITH An' me ?

MRS BROWN Both of you take your drinks

Glances are exchanged between EDWINA and TEDDY.

VELVET *first, followed by MEREDITH, put their legs over the window sill, VELVET with cocoa in a glass, MEREDITH with cocoa in a mug.*

(The table flap does not take up the whole of the window.)

THEY put the drinks on the table outside, by MI

VELVET (*to Teddy*) D'you mean . . . anybody might get that piebald horse ?

TEDDY Anybody with a shilling.

VELVET (*breathless*) Only a shilling You got a shilling, Merry ?

MEREDITH I got nothing

VELVET (*dismayed*) Nor I've got nothing.

MEREDITH : We ought to have four Donald ought to have a chance.
An' Edwina.

EDWINA . I don't want one.

MEREDITH : Father . . .

MR. BROWN (*from window*) : I'm giving no money for such nonsense.

VELVET . Then . . . we'll never get it . . .

NATIONAL VELVET

MI That's whur you're wrong I'll give you four I'll give you five, an' Velvet kin have two chances You kin pay me back in your time I got a tip from a perisher

MR BROWN Blame waste of money

MI (*looking round*) I got it *give*, didn't I tell you? Perisher from London—a hiring fellow—all toggged up, riding his seven-and-sixpenny worth He come off up by the haystack (*jerkng his head*), where the ghost horse jumps out at you I picked him up an' he give me two half-crowns Riding Belton's old May Day Top boots, spurs an' checks He didn't half come on his head

MRS BROWN Sitting behind the haystack talking to the ghost, were you, M₁?

MI (*with a grin*) That ghost an' me we get on There y'are, Velvet Choose your numbers

VELVET. Thank you awfully, M₁ I'd sooner ony have one choice. I'll give it you back Swear (*Hookng both fingers over her index finger and holding them up.*)

MI (*contemptuously*) Witches stuff! Keep yer word on' don't crack yer fingers

TEDDY Choose your numbers then!

TEDDY *leans over the table, holding the book of numbers, and with a pencil in his hand*

MEREDITH I've thought of forty-seven

VELVET (*earnestly*). But did you *make* yourself think? Or did it come of itself?

MEREDITH (*agonised*). That's what I don't know

TEDDY (*writing*) Forty-seven then (*Hesitatingly to Edwina*) Don't you . . . don't you want one, Edwina?

EDWINA (*tossing her head*): Such nonsense! And who wants the horse!

MEREDITH (*suddenly as though in pain*). Oh! I got ten now . . . printed in red letters . . . large on my brain. (*She puts her hand to her head*) It's like a . . . like a visitation.

TEDDY: That's all right. That's the one you're meant to avoid I can't change it now

VELVET (*firmly and suddenly*). I'll have 119, please. (*To Meredith*) I don't want a second one. You choose Donald's.

She turns away and walks downstage and looks at the audience, with her hands folded together.

NATIONAL VELVET

MEREDITH (*leaning over the book with Teddy, points to a number · calling, to Velvet's back*) What made you think of that one, Velvet?

VELVET (*very low*) I don't want to talk about it

She goes Right, over to Miss Ada's stable door and standing on the bar, looks in.

MRS BROWN. I haven't said the word to get up yet, Velvet. I said you could drink your drinks at the table

VELVET returns and she and MEREDITH sit down with their glass and mug.

TEDDY puts the book in his pocket

TEDDY. Here are the tickets I'll put 'em in on the table (*Puts them in.*)

MEREDITH. Will you pin them in the Bible, Mother?

MRS BROWN I will when I've finished

MR BROWN All I kin say is that piebald horse'll be meat if you win him

MRS. BROWN Time enough to worry when they get it, Father

TEDDY (*longing, hesitating at the window*) Are you coming out . . .
Edwina a bit after supper? Can she come . . . just a bit . . .
Mrs. Brown?

MRS. BROWN She can come when she's ironed her muslin, Teddy.

TEDDY moves to fence

EDWINA (*outraged*) My muslin?

MRS BROWN (*placidly*) You all got yer muslins to iron

VELVET and MEREDITH (*together outraged*) Muslins!

MI, still slowly eating, with his bad mouth.

MI Yer Ma's just rung 'em out of suds I seen 'em For the Fair tomorrow

EDWINA (*supplicating—agonised*): Mother! I can't wear my muslin! I'm too old.

MRS. BROWN *rises and begins to clear the things onto a tray*

MR BROWN (*pulling out his pipe to Edwina*) Get up an' help your mother

EDWINA gets up—then leans on window sill and calls to Teddy.

EDWINA: I'll be along, Teddy. When I've finished.

VELVET (*still sitting at the table*): But, Mother . . .

MRS BROWN (*leaning over the table out into the window: with soft and heavy certainty*): Muslins. All of you. An' your white woolly

NATIONAL VELVET

pullovers on top You'll be warm an' you'll be pretty *Say your grace then*

VELVET and MEREDITH, *simultaneously, jumping up, still with fixed looks of horror*

VELVET and MEREDITH F'whatayave received, thank God But, *Mother !*

MR BROWN *leaves the window*

MRS BROWN (*continuing softly*) Get on now upstairs an' look over your stockings for holes

VELVET and MEREDITH *stand together*

VELVET. *Stockings !* We never going to have to wear stockings !

MRS BROWN (*in the same tone*) We'll get it all over I'll run through it You'll wear your long black Christmas stockings *With* suspenders, fastened to them calico belts I bought you for the Christmas dance You'll wear white petticoats that go with .

VELVET *Petticoats !*

MRS BROWN : Petticoats That belongs to the dresses Or should do You'll wear your muslins an' your pullovers and your black lace shoes .

VELVET : *Shoes !*

MRS BROWN If you get a shock over everything, Velvet, you'll be ill an' you won't go at all. When you have muslins you have black shoes, an' when you have black shoes you have stockings or your heels rub

She retires to the back of the room

EDWINA (*taking her place at the window*) Dressed up in muslin ! At my age !

MEREDITH But I thought you liked dressing up

EDWINA (*troubled and looking out the way Teddy has gone*) . It's time I had . . . time I had . . .

She goes in. MRS. BROWN re-appears and lays three damp "babies" on the window sill. The muslin dresses, rolled up in towels.

MRS. BROWN . Damp yet. (*Trying the last one on her cheek*) Soaking. They'll stay while you go up an' look over the stockings

Exit MRS BROWN within

VELVET and MEREDITH *file dully out by the porch Left, to go upstairs*

EDWINA *comes out lightly over the window sill, looking at the three damp "babies" as though they smelt of drains.*

NATIONAL VELVET

MR and MRS BROWN are hidden within the house EDWINA sits down
swiftly in her light way by MI on the long bench in front of the table
She leans her head on her arm and looks at MI

EDWINA. MI (Softly) MI—I— (coquettishly)

MI (eating) I'm listening

EDWINA. I

She turns her head and looks after where Teddy has gone Then
back at MI

MI (chewing) I know I seen

EDWINA (very low) Don't let them tease me

MI Velvet won't An' I've told Meredith she don't no. more

EDWINA (rising) You told Meredith! I didn't think you'd tell
Meredith!

MI (looking at her) You're old enough to fall in love, but you an't
that old you kin answer me back

EDWINA (slowly) I don't think you'd any right to tell Meredith

MI (wagging one finger slowly in front of her) Have you got any
help but mine? Tell me that? Ain't you all alone?

EDWINA Alone?

MI. Alone An' well you know it, The first time you feel as you
do An' . . . sitting delicate! You make an enemy of me an' I'll tip
you off that fence you're on, me girl! You know very well I got
Meredith where (plunging his thumb hard down on the table) she belongs.

He swings round in his chair and turns his back on her. He facing
Right, and she behind him

EDWINA (puts out her hand fearfully and slowly taps him on the shoulder,
twice, as you tap a door). Right, MI

MI (pulling a large coloured crumpled handkerchief out of his pocket, still
with his back to her) Get along, now He's waiting for you I'll iron
yer muslin when I do me handkerchief for the Fair.

EDWINA presses a light kiss on the top of his curling hair and flies
out by the gate.

MI turns indignantly.

An' you don't dare ever . . . (Puts his hand to his hair to see it's not
poluted) Sauce! Edwina! (Standing up and calling louder.) Edwina!

EDWINA'S VOICE (fading): Yes?

MI. If you see that Jacob down the village, give him a lift up to
me with yer foot.

NATIONAL VELVET

EDWINA'S VOICE (*fading*) I will

The summer evening is deepening It is still only eight MI turns to the window, looks at the "babies" a minute, selects one, unrolls it, looks at it, it won't do so he puts it back and takes another, and pinches it a bit Meanwhile MRS BROWN comes slowly out from the porch Left, wearing royal blue afternoon dress of light wool material, and a well-made short black coat, the coat of a coat and skirt The dress is fastened up to her chin She is not the motherly cottage type, but more like a middle-aged barmaid, well-dressed in a way, and very stout all over, not just in the stomach Well stayed There is a hint of spangle or sequin at the neck of her dress She surveys MI at the "babies" then sits with deliberation on the chair by the table, her back to him, and her face square with the audience

MRS BROWN (*through the back of her head*) You meddling with my authority again?

MI (*with a grin*) You kin afford it Take more'n me to undermine you

MRS BROWN Which of 'em you favouring?

MI I'm doin' Edwina's for her

MRS BROWN *speaks straight at audience.*

MRS BROWN (*with a slight sigh*) Poor slip of a growing girl. (*Pause*) Poor lass. (*Pause*) Makes her irritable

MI It comes to all of us.

MRS. BROWN It does If you haven't shifted the lot her's is the one on yer left Facin'.

MI I *have* shifted 'em But I found it.

MEREDITH *appears inside the room*

That's yours, Meredith An' that's Velvet's

MEREDITH *disappears with two of the "babies", MI takes Edwina's over his arm and goes towards Miss Ada's stall door.*

(*To Mrs Brown*): You going down to the Plough?

MRS. BROWN: When William's ready. He'll want you for those sheep in a minute Don't you get blood on that dress

MI I won't. I'll put it with me coat My old Dad taught you that, didn't he?

MRS BROWN What?

MI (*opening stable door*): Ter sit like that, bolt upright, after yer evening meal. Used to try to make me do it, but I was too young

MRS. BROWN: Your Dad taught me more'n that I sometimes wish he was here.

NATIONAL VELVET

MI (*lightly*) Ah, well! He ain't And he can't be!

Turns head slightly to Mrs Brown, disappears

MRS BROWN *just looks after him Then she looks out straight ahead again*

Noise of sheep bleating comes from the slaughter house This comes up now and then, and fades

Evening light Shafts of setting sun through houses up the path to the Downs

VELVET *stands in the window behind her mother, silently looking at her*

VELVET Mi gone?

MRS BROWN (*without looking round*) He's gone

VELVET Kin I come out?

MRS BROWN You kin please yourself

VELVET, *skipping out over the sill, goes up to her mother and sits on the ground beside her also facing the audience MRS BROWN does not move*

VELVET Mother

She pauses There is no answer

I bin thinking of Edwina

No answer

(*Murmuring, and looking up at her mother*) S'awful to grow up.

MRS BROWN Nope

VELVET *Why* isn't it?

MRS BROWN (*steadily*) Things come suitable to the time. (*Pause*) Lot o' nonsense talked about growing up (*Pause*) Childbirth An' bein' in love An' death You can't know 'em till you come to them. No use guessing an' dreading You kin call it pain. But what's pain? Depends on how you are an' how you take it (*Pause*) Don't you dread nothing, Velvet

VELVET But you're so mighty Like a tree

MRS BROWN There's one thing, Velvet

VELVET: What's that?

MRS BROWN. *Pray to God you don't get fat*

VELVET (*throws her arms round the beloved great knees and kissing them: looking up at her mother's face*) Mother, mother. . . you get us all beat. Mi thinks you're Godalmighty 'N'we all do.

MRS BROWN (*looking down at last at the child*). Chut, child. Don't mount up in a torment. 'M'not grumbling. What came on me came

NATIONAL VELVET

on me, an' I couldn't keep it down An' I tell you this about growing up *You don't change nothin' underneath*

VELVET All the same s'awful to grow up All this getting ready an' getting ready for something I don't ever want children Only horses

MRS BROWN (*steadily*) Who can tell?

VELVET I've got me (*Putting her hand on her breast*) I can't ever be anything else but me

MRS BROWN (*offhand*) You're all safe You got both of us, you an' me Say your prayers now and get along

VELVET *Not yet, Not yet!*

MRS BROWN Say your prayers, I say Plunging off this time o' night an' getting your mind all in a daze an' a worry! Say 'em, I say

VELVET (*kneeling*) Ah v'Farver . eh art'n'eaven mn
mn . mn powerana glory amen *Mother!*

MRS BROWN Nice sort a mumble Yes?

VELVET . You're all right, aren't you?

MRS BROWN I'm as good as living for ever

VELVET D'you know what I say when I say real prayers?

MRS BROWN Isn't the Lord's Prayer good enough?

VELVET . I say . (*kneeling up, in earnest, putting her hands together and staring wide-eyed at her mother*) "God" I say I say "God! Give me horses Oh God, give me horses! Let me be . let me be the best rider in England" (*Wonderfully, but without sentiment*)

She never takes her eyes off her mother, whose head, turned stiffly to her, looks back at her

Mr said he'd make a miracle

MRS BROWN What's that?

VELVET . He said I was to keep my faith and that a miracle would happen

MR BROWN (*appearing over the stable door, walking in, gum boots on and overall on top*) . Hullo, Velvet Hullo!

MRS BROWN . Child gets all alight at night.

MR. BROWN (*shutting stable door*) . I'll just wash an' I'll be ready, Araminty.

VELVET (*who has risen*) : It's my driving night tonight, Mother.

MR. BROWN . Your driving night?

VELVET *exits.*

NATIONAL VELVET

MRS BROWN She knots her toes up, nights, in her bed, with bits of tape, an' drives her knees up an' down like a carriage an' pair Han't you heard the ceiling shake?

MR BROWN Mind she don't have the plaster down, then I won't be a minute

Exit

CURTAIN

Act One: Scene 2

Same Scene but next day, during the Fair, four o'clock in the afternoon The Fair is taking place not far from the cottage on the village green There is a Union Jack stuck onto the porch—a small one, tied insecurely Miss Ada's two or three old and dirty rosettes, two blue ones and a red, are pinned to her stable door Her bridle, newly cleaned, is hanging on a nail on her door There can be an occasional shout or two and a moment of tinny music coming from the Fair now and then A short blare of band-music adds to the effectiveness of Velvet's sick and miserable condition at rise of curtain

VELVET is alone on the stage Or nearly alone—for Donald's bare arm hangs over the window sill, dangling a quarter-pint milk bottle on the end of a string He has, of course, his cold, and is strictly within doors He chooses to obscure himself half behind the curtain, only his shoulder and arm are seen

VELVET wears her muslin Also long black stockings and black lace-up shoes There is Broderie Anglaise in scalloped round the hem of her skirt. The skirt falls from a yoke and is held in at the waist by a coloured leather belt. She also wears a white, well-washed (yellowish and shrunk) cardigan with short sleeves, open, and certainly too small for her It does not hang even to her waist at the back

VELVET has come back from the Fair because she feels sick She sits astride the low bench, with her head on the table, on a cushion Beside her, on the table, is a basket of cheap things she has won or bought, a teapot from the coconut shy, two coconuts, a black sambo doll, and a brilliant ribbon pincushion.

DONALD'S VOICE (*humms in that tuneless way children have*) "Ah ah . . a . . ah.

Up and down a tuneless scale as the milk bottle swings.

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET (*faintly from cushion*) Don't, Donald Keep the bottle still

DONALD'S VOICE It won't keep still

Bottle swings rather worse than ever

VELVET (*turning her face farther into the cushion*) It makes me sicker

Enter MI through Miss Ada's stable—of course making no straw mess

MI You come back fer good ?

He wears the handkerchief he ironed last night like a stock, his red hair is wet and combed He has a buttonhole

VELVET (*putting her hand out to touch the basket*) I bin out (*Almost apologetically*) I got these From the coconuts

MI (*approaching sympathetically*) Stomach turned again ?

VELVET Won't it never stop, Mi ?

MI • You'll grow out of it

DONALD'S VOICE (*sing-song*) I can't go nor Velvet can't go I gotta cold (*He makes a sort of song of it*)

MI (*sarcastic*) We know that We heard about it

DONALD (*still sing-song*) You'll catch my cold.

MI • No we won't then Not children's colds No more'n you catch dogs' fleas What you got in that bottle ?

VELVET (*agonised*) Oh don't ask him!

DONALD (*very loud, triumphant*) I got my spit

MI (*turning*) Your what ?

DONALD My spit What I spit I spit into that bottle an' save my spit

(*Pause*)

It's half full

VELVET *groans and hides her head in the cushion*

(*Whining*) I gotta do someping. When I can't go to the Fair

Continues his monotonous humming very low, and exit.

MI (*pausing, hesitant*) Velvet .

VELVET (*into cushion*) Mn Mn

MI It's gettin' on time Ain't you coming out for the draw ?

VELVET (*turning face half towards him on the cushion, softly*) • Leave me alone, Mi. I'm sick an' I'm . praying

MI (*troubled*) You ain't expecting nothing ? (*Anxious, insistent*) Are you, Velvet ?

VELVET *does not answer.*

NATIONAL VELVET

MI (*again, troubled*) Maybe I was wrong leading you to
talking like a did about miracles

No answer

Velvet, (*coming quite near her*) you be better in your room

VELVET I couldn't get there

MI Tell you what I'll do I'll carry you there

VELVET Leave me be, MI I'll last

*Turns face back into cushion, and as MI is about to go she calls him
back, faintly*

MI . .

MI What is it ? (*Turning back towards her*)

VELVET (*lifting her face round from the cushion and looking at him
earnestly*) I went up to that field where Farmer Ede keeps him, MI
I went this morning before breakfast

MI That's why yer sick You should have ate something Don't
set yer mind on that piebald horse, Velvet

VELVET (*taking no notice of this*) How high'm I, MI ?

MI Stand up an' let's see

VELVET I can't How high'm I ?

MI Well . all uv five foot four

VELVET I stood against the wall It was higher than my head He
went over it (*She says this in an awestruck way*)

MI Coo lummy!

He stands amazed

Five foot six, then or more! Just out of a field! Wiv no urging!

VELVET D'you know what I thought ?

MI (*troubled*) I kin guess, Velvet

VELVET (*sagging again*) I thought of my horses in the box. Grand
National winners That's what that piebald could be

She turns and drops her head again into the cushion.

Voices outside fence.

*Enter MR BROWN from Left by gate, wearing his good country clothes
and a buttonhole—and a collar and tie—and his cap.*

MR. BROWN (*to MI*). I promised 'em Miss Ada Threepenny rides
fer the children. Hello, Velvet You sick ?

VELVET *nods into the cushion.*

NATIONAL VELVET

MI I tell her she'll grow out of it

Picking bridle down from nail and opening stable door
I'll be out in a minute I give it a clean Thought it'd be wanted
(*Opens stable door—to ADA*) Come over then! It's your turn! It's
the poor dumb animal now—to enjoy yourself!

MR BROWN Take her out the other way She'll only bring straw
over the yard

MI'S VOICE You're telling me!

MR BROWN (*following Mi to the stable door, and looking over it*)
No need to stick to her You can leave her with Meredith taking the
rides

*Enter EDWINA hurriedly from gate in fence left She is wearing a
muslin shirt, an old white or yellowish flannel skirt and a smart
brown leather belt studded with brass studs But the muslin shirt
is (heavens) the top of a muslin dress similar to
Velvet's*

(*Turning, surveying her and speaking a little dangerously but with false
pleasantness*) Then . where you bin, Edwina, all this time? I
haven't seen you out in the Fair

EDWINA (*casting a glance at VELVET, facing her father*)

*Meanwhile VELVET has raised her head and sits a little round on
the seat*

(*nervously*) I bin down on the beach I just came to get the
gramophone

MR BROWN (*hitching one arm over the stable door and preparing for a
bit of inquisition*) Seems to me my family's getting too grand for the
Fair Didn't I give you all a half crown each to spend?

EDWINA . Yes, Father, I . .

VELVET *reaches round for her basket of prizes and puts it on her
lap.*

She evidently feels virtuous—and also better

MR BROWN Here's Velvet sick, an' Donald gotta cold, an' you
airing yourself on the beach! An' *not* alone, I'll be bound! (*Disdain-
fully*) Gramophone on the beach . . . like a London tripper!

VELVET (*in a small voice*) . I'm better now I'll be going back.

EDWINA (*at bay*): That old Fair, Father, I'm too old for it.

NATIONAL VELVET

MR BROWN (*sarcastic*) Are you ? Are you then ? And are you too old for church service too, an' too old for Sunday school ? Because all them things is bits of the life here

MRS BROWN *sails majestically in through the fence gate* Left an' it's the life here I'll have you all live, an' not any other kinda life You'll neither be too low nor too grand None of you You'll be just where I put you!

MRS BROWN (*who carries a basket of things she has bought—speaking into Edwina's back very slowly*) I'll thank you to lift up that skirt, Edwina

EDWINA (*turning round in a fright, in a faltering voice*) Lift it up ?

MRS BROWN (*woodenly*) What I said Take the hem and roll it up

Noise without Cheers

VELVET *looks nervously over fence* EDWINA *picks up the white skirt's hem and draws it up She stands in her slender legs and the edge of her camiknickers*

MRS BROWN I thought as much You've cut your dress in two

VELVET, *even at this news, does not listen, but keeps her face turned to the fence*

MR BROWN (*with anger*) Cut her dress, has she!

MRS BROWN (*after a moment's silence*)

EDWINA *drops the skirt back again.*

(*slowly*) That's all right, William That's all right, William. I'll deal with her.

As she speaks there is a rush of feet up the street, and MI, ahead of several men who press up to the fence after him, takes the whole fence at a jump (if this is possible) and stands panting before them, two little boys leaning over the fence and several men crowding behind

MI (*panting, stand, facing VELVET, hoarsely*) It is the Miracle! It is the bloody Miracle!

VELVET (*leaning forward*). What ?

MI • You get your horse.

VELVET *leans further forward.*

NATIONAL VELVET

*The basket falls from her lap, the things are spilt on the yard ground
She leans further MI springs to her*

CURTAIN BEGINS

MI (*seizing her head*) Put it down, Velvet Put it down in yer knees
put it low

Holds her head down between her knees

CURTAIN

Act One: Scene 3

SCENE *The same*

TIME *Late September Thirteen months later*

*After the curtain has risen MI comes in whistling behind him, at first
ordinarily and then a sharp blast through his two fingers*

VELVET *trails in, tired She carries a bridle, (pelham, for jumping) in one
hand She is hatless, has on jodhpurs, a shirt, no socks, and a pair of brown
shoes The jodhpurs are dirty, patched and old, but fit well Made of light
cavalry twill*

*She walks slowly up to the stable door, she hitches the bridle on the post,
takes off one shoe, looks inside it, and puts her hand into it*

MI *That dratted dog. Did you see 'im, Velvet?*

VELVET (*into her shoe*). I saw him when we were up there by the
jumps

MI (*giving it up and turning round*). Made off home I shouldn't
wonder What'ser matter wiv your shoe?

Holds out his hand for it and she gives it to him.

(*Hardly a question*) Turned the old Pie loose, have you——?

He does not listen for the answer—but examines inside shoe

VELVET, *sitting down on the old chair with one shoe on and one bare
foot.*

VELVET: He stayed up there near the hut where you put the saddle

NATIONAL VELVET

MI (*about the shoe, and into it*) It's a liddle nail come up I'll rub it wiv me knife-handle

Lays shoe on table and puts his bone knife-handle inside and begins to rub

(*Carelessly—into the shoe*) Know what you jumped today ?

VELVET *leaning back a little and gazing at her own foot*

VELVET (*with deceptive carelessness like his own*) No What did I ?

MI (*always into shoe*) You cleared five foot five Eight times. Wivout a brush (*Must be said in a quiet, wooden way*)

VELVET *sighs* She is tired Then she sits up and puts her hands between her knees and rubs them, looking at them

MI Tired ?

VELVET No

MI 'Ow long we bin training him ?

VELVET (*monotonously, still looking at her hands*) Nearly a year

MI (*stopping his rubbing*) You look back a bit, Velvet, n' see what we done You look back to when he lost his jumpin' when he got you setting on his back What did we do then ?

VELVET (*looking up*) We started him all over again

MI • That we did Because why ? Because a horse that'll jump free, like a wild horse, s'got to lose it all an' learn it all over again from the start. *To jump natural's too chancy* We're having none of that You look back, Velvet, to the times I bin up there, lying under his belly, hid in the grass, and caught him a flick as he went over You remember that time when he started dropping his quarters ?

VELVET (*a little surprised*) Yes, Mi

MI N' why am I asking you ? I want you to remember all of it. I gotta reason D'you remember how I blindfolded you ? An' made you jump blind ?

VELVET . Yes, Mi

MI • N' why was that ?

VELVET : You said I gotta bad trick of moving on him before I got to the jump,

MI ; So you did. So you had. Better the horse should teach you how to lift than that you should teach him wrong. First you taught him ; then he taught you, n' didn' I have to watch you both and never take my eye off you ? N' didn' I tell you it was timing, timing, timing ? Everything's timing. N' you didn't know what I meant.

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET . But I do now

MI Ah you do now You both do now You haven't got but one will between you, though it's taken a year to do it (*Impressively*) An' what's come of it all? See what he is? Five foot five inches Eight times wivout a miss Know what I think?

VELVET (*almost lustlessly—tonelessly*) I know what you think

MI Let's hear it then

VELVET (*eyes on his face, as in a trance*) You think he can run in the Grand National

MI (*suddenly with a gesture holding out his hand as though the words could be unsaid*) Wait then Before we think it . Didn't we start him right? And slow? And patient? Up hill and down dale 'aven't we walked him? There ain't a hill-surface for miles round 'aven't we climbed him up of? Ah *we* never started to jump him like some folk do till his quarters swelled up with muscle like a boxer's arm, did we?

Leaning over her, suddenly, in a meaning voice.

We taken trouble, Velvet.

VELVET . Yes, Mi.

MI (*gloriously, yet quietly*) . And now he's fit An' he's a toff Now he's a swell An' nobody knows it

VELVET (*heartfelt*) Oh, Mi oh, Mi you know everything wh—what a pity you don't ride!

MI (*looking down at her almost grimly*): Rider's all right

VELVET What rider?

MI You

Silence. While Velvet never takes her eyes off him, as though hypnotised, her two hands are drawn out from between her knees and clench, unknown to her at her waist. Even her little shoulders are lifted up.

(*To himself—but gloriously—like a prayer of self-praise*): There's men . . . as can see things in people There's men . . . as can choose a horse, an' that horse'll win. It's not the look of the horse, no, nor of the child, nor of the woman. It's the thing *we* can see, it's the thing my father saw in your Ma. . You got to trust me, Velvet. You an' that horse come out of the sky to meet each other, so to speak, an' I was there to see it happen Without me you wouldn't have known it.

VELVET (*low*): Known what? Mi?

NATIONAL VELVET

MI Known the power there is in the two of you A kind of innocence in that horse, and a kind of a faith in you that comes from your hands to the horse You got no strength, but he's got it for you An' them hands of yours, Velvet, what that horse depends on

VELVET *holds out her hands and looks at them wonderingly as MI speaks* would be worth a fortune to one of them world-travelling, violin-playing men I've read about

She lets her hands fall idly in her lap

An' the big thing is, Velvet, like yer Ma *yer all faith* An' that's the kind of power that dumb animal can understand He'll never look back while he believes what your two hands and your thin legs is saying to him He'll go round that National like a horse with nothing on his back but a *prayer*. For that's about all you weigh!

VELVET *drops her face in her hands*

(*With a change of tone, more practical*) Listen, Velvet!

She looks up slowly

Who's to know, eh? Who's to know? Ther's jockeys in Belgium no one's ever seen before

Pause . VELVET same attitude

I don't know but . . what it could be done

VELVET (*to whom the strain is unbearable, she must speak*) You think . . he could do it?

MI The *two* of you could do it.

VELVET . Oh, MI—could he be hurt?

MI Him? (*With a laugh—for isn't she much more likely to be hurt?*) No With that heart an' them legs an' that brain in his head? No . Here take yer shoe (*throws it down*)

VELVET (*suddenly relaxes, trembling, head bowed, and groping for the shoe, putting it on with her head down*) Who'd you write to? Fer entries? (*This must be said after a pause visibly to hide her upset*)

MI Wetherby's.

VELVET . Where's that?

MI : Telephone book. London somewhere

VELVET *gets up, unhooks the bridle from the fence*

VELVET (*dreaming*): Wetherby's . (*Pause*) An' who's to know I'm a girl . .?

MI (*practical*) . Flat's a pancake you are. You'd pass. Ter look at. But there's a changing room up there. Where you undress.

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET (*practical*) Whad'jou undress for ?

MI (*practical*) Change your day things for your silks

VELVET But you needn't undress to your skin You could
keep your vest

MI (*dreaming*) You could you could it could happen It
never 'as

(*Pause*)

It jus' wants thinking out

CURTAIN

NATIONAL VELVET

Act Two: Scene I

*Early December Interior of living-room Hair-washing night—after
supper*

VELVET sits, facing the audience, behind the main living-room table (which, when not in use for meals, has a thick cloth on it with a bobbed fringe)

MI sits to stage Right of table, his chair tilted back, studying the entry form from *Wetherby*, which has come by that afternoon's post VELVET has an old evening paper spread out on the table and is leaning forward tracing out what she reads with her finger An albert lamp (oil lamp with coloured glass, swelled out base containing oil, and oil glass chimney) stands on the table to Velvet's left (Stage Left)

VELVET has just had her hair washed and wears a turban of a towel She has her old dressing gown on, much too short, a left-off of Edwina's Trodden down slippers and pyjamas underneath

VELVET Don't the racing writers talk queer

She reads He does not reply.

(Reads aloud) "the conditions will be ideal for all except the mudlarkers" "what's that, MI?"

MI (*gruffly*) Dud talk o' mutts

VELVET (*tracing with her finger on the paper*) "Munition started slowly—he was always tailed"

MI (*briefly*) The same

VELVET "he galloped the opposition down in fine style"

MI And the same

VELVET (*looking at him*) Ah, no! I like that It's what I'd do I'd gallop the opposition down. It's grand.

MI If you like.

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET I do

MI (*reading from the entry form*) We gotta call him something

VELVET What? The Piebald? Can't we call him "The Piebald"?

MI If you like It's a mutt name

Silence

(*Continuing*) We gotta choose the name, an' choose racing colours and send up and ask Wetherby if they'll pass 'em Sooner the better They'll print 'em in the Calendar

VELVET (*slowly—reluctantly*) Could we call him Unicorn?

MI That's the sort Longish Historical You gotta think he'll be put down in the racin' history books.

VELVET Only if he wins, Mi

MI Win or no, he goes down They all go down

VELVET Lamp's smoking, Mi

He turns the wick lower

An', Mi . .

MI M'm

VELVET (*with a face of grief*) I'll never like anything but The Piebald It's his name He got to go in the books like that.

MI (*looking up and perceiving her grief*) You call him what you like! They weren't all ser grand There was Jerry M. and Shady Girl, an' Old Joe and The Hunter An' Miss Lizzie Why The Colonel won it twice! You call 'im The Piebald an' it'll do fine.

VELVET (*heartfelt*) Thank you, Mi.

MI Here, take the papers an' look at 'em

Hands the form and a sheet with it across to VELVET

As he is about to hand the papers across to VELVET, MRS BROWN stands in the door away from kitchen, Right. He takes the paper back

MRS BROWN Take that wet towel off, Velvet, an' give it a rub like I told you

She exits

VELVET *unwinds the towel, she has a smaller towel round her shoulders She now begins to rub Her hair stands out straight all round her head. MI looks again at the entry form.*

MEREDITH'S voice (*calling from upstairs*): Velvet!—

NATIONAL VELVET

No answer VELVET *can't hear* MI *cocks an eye up but goes on reading*

Velvet!

MEREDITH *appears, hanging over the stairs half-way up*

I say—Velvet!

Like all children she prefers to call rather than come down

MI *(getting up, and pocketing the papers)* Seems there's no peace in this house

MEREDITH Did you get the millet?

VELVET *(at last aware that someone is speaking)* Whad'ju want?
(Stops rubbing)

MEREDITH Did you get the millet I say?

VELVET *(without looking round—dropping the towel on the floor)* Yes

Pulling out the little drawer of the table and tilting her chair back to do so

It's in here

She draws out several large pods of canary millet, tied together at the stems, and turns her chair as though to throw them to Meredith

MEREDITH Don't! The seeds'll come out

She runs down the stairs and takes the bunch from Velvet

Who's next? Is it me?

MI Yer Ma's doing Edwina Can't you smell the vinegar? You better stay down. She mus' be just on done

MEREDITH *(running upstairs)*. I'll jus' . . . put one bit in I'll be back *(Disappears)*

MI *has his back to the kitchen door, in the middle of what he says*

EDWINA *appears silently, towelled like Velvet and hears what he says.*

MI *(he leans one hand on the table and speaks earnestly)* Hair-washing night's no night to choose, but I gotta bit of news, Velvet I gotta bit of luck I bin keepin' it An' it won't keep—but it'll have to

VELVET *(open-eyed, staring at him)* Can't you tell me now? Is it good? Is it good?

MI *(moving his head up and down solemnly)*. S'good. S'almost too good to tell. I bin bursting with it But, before I tell you, Velvet, I tell you one thing.

EDWINA *still stands in doorway but they don't see her.*

VELVET What?

NATIONAL VELVET

MI (*very solemnly*). *Should tell yer Ma if I were you*

VELVET *stares at him, and he puts the entry form into her hand*

You go up an' you put this under yer pillow You can look some more at it when Merry comes down

MI *exits under stairway, and VELVET gets up, and slowly follows him, leaving towel on the floor and reading as she goes up the stairs*

EDWINA *in her skirt, but with her blouse off, comes slowly into the room, picks up Velvet's discarded towel Puts it on the chair back, looks up the stairs after Velvet, and begins to unwind her own towel*

MRS BROWN *follows from the kitchen She wears a big apron over her good afternoon dress*

MRS BROWN (*twisting a chair round in her hand*) Sit straddle then

EDWINA *sits astride a chair with her two hands on its back and* MRS

BROWN *begins to rub Edwina's pretty hair Merry runs down the stairs*

(*Pausing for a moment*) Get on, Merry Get your dress off, (*nods her head towards the kitchen*) and fill up the two white jugs and put another kettle on .

MERRY Need I have that vinegar ?

MRS BROWN (*shortly, returning to her rubbing*). Brings up the lights (*She rubs*)

Exit MERRY to kitchen

(*Taking the towel off Edwina's head and feeling the hair with her hand*) That's taken the drip off That's the worst You can rub your own now while I sit a minute before I go in to Merry .

She sits at table Left and draws the newspaper towards her and puts her spectacles on EDWINA rubs on for a second

While EDWINA talks she gives a fugitive rub now and then so as to keep the good work going, but not so hard that she can't concentrate on what she is saying.

EDWINA (*low*): Mother

MRS BROWN (*without looking up from the paper*) What is it ?

EDWINA (*meaningly*) Velvet had a letter this afternoon, did you see ?

MRS BROWN (*still not looking up*) Is it your business ?

EDWINA (*hesitating*). No . . no . . well . .

MRS. BROWN You got trouble enough to run your own life, Edwina

NATIONAL VELVET

EDWINA (*sulkily*) Well, I don't think, if you want to know the flat of it, you ought to let her be whisperin' and whisperin' with Mi like she does. They keep saying things in corners—you know they do. Why, just sitting in the room with them, I know I'm not wanted. An' jus' now I heard him tell her she ought to tell you.

MRS BROWN (*raising her head and looking straight at Edwina*) Tell me what?

EDWINA How should I know! But I hate their secrets! An' I don't think they ought to have them. An' (*taking a breath—because this is very daring*) Teddy doesn't think so neither.

But Edwina has gone too far. Mrs Brown sits back a shade and draws up a shade and there is a majesty creaking in her stays.

MRS BROWN When Teddy has a right to come into our family life he shall speak. And even then I don't know that he shall. There's feelings deeper than love, Edwina, I'll have you know.

EDWINA (*startled*) Is there?

MRS BROWN (*taking the spectacles off that she had put on to read the paper and laying them on the table speaking as though Edwina had better know what's what in life*) I tell you this, Edwina—Nothing passes me in this house, and I don't need you to tell me. Maybe Velvet is a strange one. Maybe I was too. What I felt for Mi's father was as open anybody could see it. An' what Velvet feels fer Mi's the same. It's what a horse feels fer someone that rides. It's what a panner feels fer someone that plays it. Mi and his father before him—they was unusual men.

She stares straight ahead—then rises briskly, and in a change of voice.

After I've done with Merry I'll give your head a last rub.

EDWINA (*jumping up, glad to change the subject*) But I'm dry. Nearly dry. (*Fluffs her hair with her hand*) I am dry! Can't I go?

MRS BROWN You can't be dry. Let me feel.

EDWINA comes up to her and Mrs Brown feels round her neck under her hair.

Damp all round your glands. (*Going towards kitchen door Right*) Come into the kitchen and you can hang it round the boiler while I wash Merry.

EDWINA (*hanging back*) Teddy's just . . .

MRS BROWN (*her back to Edwina, speaking almost into the kitchen door*) Teddy kin wait.

NATIONAL VELVET

EDWINA (*mutinous*) He can't

MRS BROWN (*turning at the door, looks at Edwina, and instead of saying something rebuking, says gently as she eyes her*) Anybody can wait, Edwina, for a pretty girl.

EDWINA'S *rather sulky face lights up all over, and she follows her mother*

Exit both

Immediately MI reappears, sauntering in, half casually, and as soon as he sees the coast is clear he goes back to the stairs and whistles up them. He waits. Then whistles again. VELVET comes down half-way, sees him and comes right down

MI It won't keep, Velvet I bin down the road, but I come back, it won't keep

VELVET What won't keep

MI What I got in my pocket I gotta tell you (*Pulling out a piece of paper*) See this?

VELVET (*glancing over at the kitchen door and coming nearer*) What is it?

MI (*holding it up facing her with the tips of the fingers of both hands*) It's a clearance. Comes from Russia. We got our way easy now. We can change this for a licence to ride.

VELVET (*looking at the wobbly piece of paper*) I can't read it, Mi.

MI (*putting it back in his pocket*) An' you don't need to. What you got to do to-morrow is to sign it. You got to write "J Tasky" on it.

He is enjoying her mystification

VELVET Who's he then?

MI He's you. Or will be in a post or two.

They come a little further in the room by the table

COR everything drops into your hand, Velvet. You got the lucky number in life! Look at you . . . standing there in yer shrunk-up clothes an' me with this in me pocket for you!

VELVET But what is it, Mi?

MI: What is it? It's Tasky's clearance. What they sent him over with from his place—so's everything'd be in order—an' he not even in England! What a catch!

VELVET (*falteringly*) Where is he then?

MI: Being sick on the Baltic I shouldn't wonder. He come over here early to tram, and he brought his horse by air, an' it dropped

NATIONAL VELVET

dead when they unloaded it at Croyden No traveller, I dare say So
he hadn' gotta horse, had he? So he didn' want a clearance, did
he? So he turned roun' an' went back An' here we are! You
don't seem as though you took it in!

VELVET (*bewildered, sits down on a chair by the table, and looks up at him Slowly*) We gotta have the name in by the second Tuesday
in January

MI Say that in the rules?

VELVET Yes

MI (*still jubilant*) Well, we'll have it in We've put our backs in
this now an' our shirts an' all What is it you call it then? 'Bout that
horse? Putting it what?

VELVET (*staring at him and says mechanically*) Putting The Piebald
in history

MI Well, I'm putting you in history See? Like my old Dad
put Araminty Potter It's a foreseen thing Like God might a thought
of (*Pause*) Coo You ain't never going to cry!

VELVET's head sinks lower and she cries softly on the table

(*anxiously*) What you crying for? What's a matter, Velvet? Now
we got this thing all taped there's no call to cry! (*Suddenly furious,
and banging one hand on the table*) Lift yer head up, Velvet! Don't
you keep your head down on me like that! Giving me the jumps!
I won't have it!

VELVET (*lifting her tear-stained face suddenly*) Haven't I got the
jumps? As well as you? (*wailing*) I gotta tell mother

MI (*angry*) An' didn't I tell you then to tell yer mother! But you
can't tell her about this bit I jus' told you! It's one thing to tell her
about running the horse in the race, ay, an' I tell you ter tell her that!
But this other's a bite too much She wouldn't stand for it And if
she didn't stand fer it, the whole thing's bust N' well you know it!
You gotta shut up like 'n oyster an' stand the wear and tear.. oh
my she's.. I'll be outside

He nips out by the passage past the stairs Enter MRS BROWN.

MRS. BROWN *shuts the door behind her and looks at VELVET.*

VELVET (*springing up, tear stained, facing her mother*) Mother! I
gotta tell you.. I'll tell you now! Mi's in the street.. waiting...
he's just gone...

MRS. BROWN *walks a step or two up to the table, majestic, waiting,
stern, with EDWINA'S suspicions in her mind.*

NATIONAL VELVET

It's him an' me Mi an' me together !

A shudder goes through MRS BROWN'S thick figure, or some sort of slight start, as she stands stock still and looks down at Velvet, standing slight and eager on the other side of the table

(coming round the table and catching hold of her mother's sleeve, though MRS BROWN does not respond) Mi an' me Mother, sit down! Sit down, won't you! I can't tell you while you stand like that, Mother, looking at me

She pauses, staring at her mother, who slowly sits, unresponsive, fear in her stout breast for this child VELVET sinks on to her heels on the floor, by her mother's side, one hand on her mother's knee, a hand her mother does not take.

we think we think The Piebald *(She falters)*

MRS BROWN What's that!

VELVET *(faintly)* . We think he's fit . . . to run fit to run in the National .

She sits back on her heels a little, breathless But the effect is much greater than she could have supposed

MRS BROWN *(her big body relaxing, puts one fat hand up to her face)* . Almighty God ! *(She breathes this in grateful relief)*

VELVET, horrified, stands up and backs a pace, staring at her mother

MRS BROWN pulls herself together, and looks round at VELVET After what she has half thought all other news is very little to her

(Removing her hand from her face—half mechanically speaking) What's that you're telling me ? Velvet ? In the National ?

VELVET *(whispering, reluctant, understating)* . Thought of runnin' him . . .

MRS BROWN *(ahead of her, taking no notice of Velvet—half contempt)* . Mi Taylor an' his miracles ! That's what they are. The two of 'em the same. Mi—an' his miracles!

VELVET *(not understanding)* . Mother!

MRS BROWN Father an' son There's no end to what they think people can do! The Grand National with them jumps ?

VELVET . Thirty jumps. Fifteen jumps twice round . . .

MRS. BROWN *(with a slight laugh)* Stiff Yes An' stiff Where's Mi ? With you telling me this ?

VELVET *(rising)* He's outside. Waiting.

NATIONAL VELVET

MRS BROWN (*rising and going to kitchen door*) He better be! You fetch him in

VELVET *exits under stairs and* MRS BROWN *opens the kitchen door*
You can get on out, Edwina, now if you're dry

She leaves the door open EDWINA *comes through followed by MERRY*
EDWINA *has done her hair evidently at the kitchen glass* It is put
up in a knot at the nape of her neck she is hatless but she has a
gay scarf twisted round her neck, and her overcoat on

MRS. BROWN You've wasted no time, Edwina Where are you
meeting Teddy! Don't be late now

*As they speak MERRY goes straight upstairs, taking the towel off her
neck and hanging it over her arm as she goes*

EDWINA By the sea wall I won't be long.

She exits, passing MI and VELVET, who come in.

MI *stands rather to attention, as though he were being engaged for a
job* VELVET *leaves him and comes over to her mother* MRS BROWN
*pauses a moment, glancing up to see that MERRY has gone away
upstairs*

MRS BROWN (*looking sternly at Mi*) Is this nonsense you bin putting
in her head?

MI (*stoutly and formally*) No, ma'am

MRS BROWN Is it sense then?

MI (*as before*) Yes, ma'am

MRS BROWN What makes you think that horse can get round . .
that terrible race?

VELVET (*eagerly, imploringly*) It can

MRS BROWN Can it, Mi?

MI (*understating*) Shouldn' wonder

MRS BROWN (*shrewdly*) You got the rules on you, haven't you,
Velvet? Come by the post?

*Unseen by MRS BROWN and VELVET, MI puts his finger with a grin
to his nose* Nothing escapes this woman

VELVET *draws the crumpled blue entry form and rules out of her
dressing gown pocket . . and hands it to her mother.*

MRS BROWN *sits down at the table, puts on her spectacles and looks
at the rules* MI *draws nearer* He and Velvet stand

(*As she reads and speaks into the rules*) I know you bin up to some-
thing Messing about with that horse . . morning . . . noon . . . an'
night I know you bin having hopes . . . (*Reads away to herself*)

NATIONAL VELVET

as she speaks) I'm bound to say I didn't think they were *this* high!
(*Putting the rules flat on the table and putting her fat finger with a finality on the paper*) The Grand National indeed!

She has evidently read something that changes her tone and she looks straight at MI and puts her spectacles up on her forehead

Here's a fine race! The Grand National with that shilling horse

VELVET Mother . (*imploring*)

MRS BROWN (*relentless*) And neither of you's seen, I suppose, what you got to pay!

VELVET (*aghast*) Pay?

MRS BROWN An' you, Mⁱ? Did you think a hundred pound's about on every bush?

VELVET A hundred pounds

MI (*advancing a step, really anxious*) Not in the rules! Not in the rules, it isn't written there

MRS BROWN So you didn't even read it through, you . pair of you! Ha! An' you, Mⁱ, that's so foreseeing!

MI (*sulky, upset*) I knowed well enough there was money to pay

MRS BROWN A hundred pounds, that's what there is to pay (*Sternly*) Well, that's put "finish" (*It is a statement*)

There is a silence MI does not look at Velvet

Hasn't that put "finish"?

MI (*with a sniff*) Yes

MRS BROWN (*rising and walking majestically to the side-board, speaking as she stoops to open one of the doors*) It's "yes", is it? I like to hear sense

Pulls out from the back of the cupboard a small mahogany tea box.

You leave it to me to speak the non-sense

Walking back to the table and taking a key from her bunch

Now . . . we'll hear something . . . perhaps you never knew. (*Speaking to MI—opens the box*) I owe you something, Mⁱ Taylor Did you know your father trained me for nothing? Paid for the boat . . . an' wouldn't touch the prize-money? (*Tipping it out*) If you weren't your father's son, Mⁱ, I might say you were a fool . . . I might say you'd made a mistake . . . with a horse like that . . . but I'll lay you've made no mistake, an' I'm willing to give you the hundred, yes, and a bit over.

She stands back, and the gold sovereigns lie on the table

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET (*breathless, beatific*) Your prize? Your prize money! What you won? You kep' it all this time?

MRS BROWN (*hardly*) I kep' it. Thought I might want it. Thought I would. (*To change Velvet's still face*) An' what do you win, Velvet, if you win?

VELVET Oh thousands. An' a Cup. But (*Out of breath wild with still happiness*) It's not that. It's fer the hoise. It's for the horse. (*She clasps her hands*)

MI (*near table looking down*) Cor look at it. Never seen a gold coin since I was a lad.

MRS BROWN There's a hundred an' fifty there. A hundred fer yer entry and more for expenses. I gotta fancy, Velvet, that you pay your entry in this same. (*Tapping the coins*)

But VELVET is speechless

MI Pay in the gold itself?

MRS BROWN (*looking up at him*) It might bring you luck.

MI Wetherby's'll think it odd.

MRS BROWN (*looking back at the papers again*) Where's the bit where you sign?

MI (*over her shoulder*) Not that side. That's the Gland Military. Next page over. "Liverpool continued." That's where it says.

MRS BROWN (*reads in silence. Then aloud*) Queer thing. Yes, I had a feeling. I always had a feeling.

MI What?

MRS BROWN (*her finger on the rules and reading aloud*) See there? See what it says? "Ten sovs each." "Fifty sovs extra." It's all written with sovs. There's the wording clear. You use them sovereigns. I had a fancy they'd come in.

Before VELVET or MI can reply or say more Enter MR BROWN from behind stairs from outside, in gum boots and carrying a hurricane lantern

MR BROWN (*standing still under the stairs*) I want you, Mi. There's a pipe blocked in the yard, and it's flooding. It'll be coming in under the door! Get your gum boots on and come now.

He turns to go out and MI follows him, with a look at Velvet

When they have both gone out, VELVET looks after her father and says low and awed and dejected.

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET *Who'll tell father?*

MRS BROWN (*standing up, majestic*) *I'll tell your father*

Perhaps putting her arms on her hips akumbo

Looks at VELVET a moment, but VELVET looks at her

Cut along now to your bed That's enough for one night

VELVET (*low*) There's more, Mother

MRS BROWN Ther' is?

VELVET I couldn' do it if I didn't tell you I gotta tell you all
You gotta pretend I'm not your child

MRS BROWN What's that, Velvet? (*Steadily*)

VELVET (*gulping*) You was nineteen when you swum the channel
I'm fourteen but my chance's come early You mustn't think I'm your
child (*Looking up suddenly and speaking strongly*) *I'm a girl with
a Chance*

MRS BROWN *stands* VELVET *suddenly goes to her and looks in her
face*

*Nobody kin ride him like I can, Mother He knows me, he knows every
thought I think*

MRS BROWN (*taking Velvet's shoulder*) What's that? In the race,
Velvet? Is that what you're telling me? Is that what you've got in
your head? Is Mi in on this?

VELVET Mi an' me we think I kin ride the horse

MRS BROWN Are you daft?

VELVET Was you daft?

MRS BROWN I was nineteen

VELVET You got to take your chance when it comes Mi an' me
we've thought it all out If you ask him he can tell you every step
how it can come true If I'm found out the worst they can do is send
me home—an' father'll be angry Just as likely I won't be found out.
Well, then, we'll do our best The horse is great You know he is.
He's like a Bible horse.

MRS BROWN (*leaving Velvet standing and walking to the dresser with
the mahogany box She stoops and puts it in the cupboard, then standing
with her back half turned to Velvet and her hand supporting her on the
dresser shelf*). I'll listen to you, Velvet. I'll listen to you in a minute
You stop where you are an' let me get me breath.

Turning round and facing audience but leaning a little on the dresser.
But I don't want to speak to Mi about it. Tell him not to speak to

NATIONAL VELVET

me about it Not a word (*She pants a little*) If I'm to give my leave
let there be no whisperin' and talking I can't be but your mother,
Velvet It's going to be a weight upon me I mus' take it in I mus'
understand it Then I must put it from me, an' pray to God

CURTAIN

Act Two: Scene 2

March—the day before the National

TIME 3 a m

MI is alone in the living-room He has not dared light a lamp He is lit by a rather large torch (*extra bicycle variety*) which stands on a small table and he has built a little house of three books one book each side and a book as roof to direct and shield the light on him He wears his old stable trousers, and his oldest coat with collar turned up and heaven knows what underneath (*he doesn't go in for pyjamas*) and his hair is rough He has been in bed but has got up as he is He has a small attaché case (*a little bigger, but not a suitcase*) open on a chair and into this he is putting food for the journey He takes from his pocket a half pound slab of chocolate wrapped in its cover Then from the dresser cupboard a couple of bakelite mugs, and puts them in the open attaché case Then turns swiftly, moves out of the ring of light, and fishes a bigger suitcase from behind a piece of furniture, dragging it into the light, kneels, opens the lid and begins to hunt down at the back of some folded clothes for something The something is a small medicine bottle When he has pulled it up he sits back on the floor, uncorks it, smells it, corks it up and hunts in his pocket Pulls out an old spoon and a bit of string, wraps the string round bottle and spoon and at this moment, VELVET appears in the dark in dressing gown at the top of stairs We only see her very faintly as she hesitates at the top, then comes down a step or two.

VELVET • MI .

MI (*without much surprise, looking up from the floor*): That's the third time in two hours. Whur's yer will power?

VELVET (*coming down another step or two*): What time is it?

MI • S'three. Didn't I tell you I'd wake you at four?

VELVET: Horse-box'll be here in two hours.

NATIONAL VELVET

MI Two hours is two hours Back to your bed

VELVET (*coming almost down the stairs*) What's in the bottle?

MI Mint To settle your stomach It's going with the food

Gets up, puts bottle on the table, and bends over the big suitcase

VELVET (*coming now into the ring of light*) Why don't you light the lamp?

We see her hair is short.

MI (*fishing up an old Homburg hat from the suitcase*) Yer father'd see it through his eyelids Try this one since you're here

VELVET (*wriggling*) My body's all over hairs

MI *sits her down, stands behind her, puts on the hat and examines the back of her neck*

MI (*back to suitcase and bringing out a pair of scissors*) Here's some more (*Then snipes and concentrates and snipes.*) to keep 'em company (*Looks again*) There You can't tell from the top

VELVET Isn't my neck all white? Where the hair was?

MI Yes, it is Iodine an' water'll settle that

VELVET (*swinging round on the stool she is sitting on*). MI *What* about me jacket? I keep asking you Me *silk* jacket?

MI You leave them things You *leave* yer jacket! (*He is testy and fiddling in the suitcase to put back the hat*) I got me sister sewing it

VELVET (*with broad astonishment*) You gotta sister?

MI I gotta sister I got two

VELVET You never told us

MI (*shortly*) I'm no family man Where I sprung from . . an' what I lef' behind's nobody's business

VELVET But your sister's my business . . if she's sewing my jacket. . . .

MI: An' well she can do that for me! I never yet asked her for a penny. An' I got her her job too. Sews fer a tailor in Liverpool, I sent her that ol' top of yours yer mother said was past mending. She's fitting by that. Black an' pink I told her She's getting the cap, too

VELVET An' the boots? An' the breeches?

MI. You leave it to me up at Aintree. It'll sort itself Overnight. There's valets go round with spares in their cases you can hire.

VELVET Valets?

MI: Fellows that look after the jockeys. You can hire the fellows,

NATIONAL VELVET

too Press up their clothes an' do their boots There's a gang of them
go roun' the race meetings Ain't you going to try and sleep, Velvet ?

VELVET (*dejectedly, shaking her head*) No, Mi

MI (*closing the lid of the suitcase, fastening the two fasteners and carrying it to the door and setting it ready to be taken out turning on her as though making up his mind*) Now listen When we get up there it'll be black late, and like as not pouring with rain You'll be in no state to be listening to me You'll be fer bed I got to do some nosing roun' too There's chaps I'll see an' chaps I'll listen to I'll be round the bais I might go roun' to the Adelphi

VELVET The Adelphi ?

MI Why not ? Place is full of chaps like me Not on the top level Round the pantries You can see things if you cross the hall purposeful from time to time Nobody asks There's the telephone lobbies, too Head lads do a bit of telephoning Maybe I'll see Dorothy Paget chatting about

VELVET Who's she ?

MI Dear God, Velvet!

VELVET (*huddling herself*) I'll never get my feet warm

MI Now listen, Velvet I'm going to take you roun' *now* since you won't go back to bed

Going to the small open attaché case

I gotta map here, see ?

Opens it and pulls a chair beside her.

It's a map of the course I got it off a chap You oughta walk round with me tomorrow before the race but if I get you tired you'll be no use Besides it's best you do without seeing what the other side of Beecher's like

VELVET (*low preoccupied with her condition She is getting sick*): When did you see it ?

MI (*indignant*) When did I see it ? I told you often enough I know it all like my thumb! I used to shift coal on trucks alongside of Beecher's You can't see much on the National, there's such a crowd But the Liverpool Autumn meeting in November you got all to yourself. Why you can stan' up on the truck line an' see the ambulance come, an' see the men standing there with ropes ready an' all

VELVET. Ooooh, Mi, ready for what ?

MI Ready to lug the horses out of the drop

VELVET: Ooooh . . . Mi

NATIONAL VELVET

MI An' that's what I wanta tell you It's not going to happen to you! You got The Piebald jumping under you Don't you forget that All I mean is don't you be surprised when you rise at Beecher's, an' don't think you've jumped over the lip of a quarry, 'cos it isn't a quarry, an' you'll stop dropping in the end an' if you're not surprised the horse won't be

VELVET (*faintly*) Yes, M1

MI Now We'll take the jumps round Same as if you were walking round which you should be Now then jus' listen (*Holding the map on both their knees*) You start *here* at the corner It says "Paddock" there see on the map

VELVET Yes, M1

MI (*irritated*) An' don't keep saying 'Yes, M1' Don't fuss too much about your start It's no odds getting off in a tear-away What you got to do is to jump round an' jump clean and go as fast as you can *when you know what* you're doing But wait till you know what you're doing before you hurry The 'ole Pie won't be hard to hold He's not raced before You got him under your thumb Now (*Probably getting up as he talks—excitedly*) first there's the tan—as you cross the road Shut your eyes going over or the tan'll fly up in yer face Keep 'em shut, d'you hear! Then first fence plain fence Next fence . plain fence (you done as much in the mushroom valley!) There's nothing in them but don't despise 'em Many's come down at the first two Then rail, ditch, an' fence, a *whopper* (Listen, can't you!) You'll see a yellow-looking log lying low on the ground an' you mus' take off from it Then there's *Beecher's* Now (*With even greater emphasis*) *There's no need to fall at Beecher's* D'you hear me?

VELVET (*feebly—she is getting sick*) Yes, M1

MI no need at all! I watched it an' I *know* If I was sitting below you on the far side I wouldn't want to see the eyes popping out of your head as you come down Just sit back It's a long way down but if you don't jerk his head he'll land steady . .

VELVET What's the drop, M1?

MI I don't know but it looks twenty! On account of the ditch at the bottom Then there's a plain jump *Then there's the Canal Turn* (*With great pomp, as though he had arrived at a very vital part of his description*)

VELVET M1, I *can't* remember it all!

MI: Put yer mind to it. The Canal Turn's a teaser. There's a chance of horses running out here. You see the canal (*points*) shining right

NATIONAL VELVET

ahead A pack of seagull's I rise most likely as the horses come Remember
don't you go skidding in to the left an' savin' ground

VELVET (*pleading*) Mi, I swear I can't remember any more

MI (*aghast*) But I got to tell you about Valentine's!

VELVET I'm getting sick again You're making me sick again

She lets the map fall on to the floor

MI (*suddenly miserable*) You're a nice one

*He picks up the map and slowly folds it Looks at her She is sitting
with her head in her hands*

I'll go and get you that brick I put in the back of the oven last night

(*Goes to kitchen door as he goes through*) There'll be time yet
to heat another before the horse-box comes (*Exits*)

VELVET *moves her head restlessly from side to side suddenly
she sits bolt upright with desperate gesture and her eyes are riveted
on the bottle on the table Picks up the bottle, pulls out the cork and
drinks it down Puts back the cork and the bottle back on the table*

MI *returns with the brick wrapped in some old dusters*

MI Set down N'put yer feet on it (*She does, despondently*) On
top of everything its come on to rain

VELVET (*much more brightly*) Go on telling me some more, Mi
But not about the jumps Yes tell me about the water jump

MI (*dully The life has gone out of him suddenly*) Water jump's pink

VELVET • Pink?

MI (*just as despondently*) Puddled on pink clay Looks meaty. It's
opposite (*speaks drearily*) the Grand Stand The people'll be yelling.

VELVET (*there is a complete change of mood—she bright and eager—
he despondent*) Go on, Mi Tell me some more

MI, *at window, but suddenly turning to look at her.*

MI (*bitterly*) M'murderin' you, Velvet I'm taking you up there
to kill you

VELVET • No fear! No, you aren't Piebald an' me'll go round like
crickets

MI I wish yer mother could be there, Velvet

VELVET She will be there! She's inside me! (*Touching her thin
chest*) You bin about all night. You're low You gimme back the
map of the course there and I'll sit an' study it. But don't you tell me
any more. When I've looked at it an' looked at it . . . (*She speaks more*

NATIONAL VELVET

and more ecstatically as the drink works) . things'll just slide along,
an' I'll .

MI (*gloomily*) Think a race like this is won by luck?

VELVET *Everyone* riding to-morrow will know moie'n I do I
can't win the way they do I can't win by *knowing*

MI What's your way, then?

VELVET (*gently and airily*) Jus' believing Jus' knowing The Pie-
bald can do it, an' *telling him* so Telling him so all the time so's he
nevei forgets it (*Turns face towards him*) I got no other way

*As she says the last two lines MI looks at her sharply, and going near
the table picks up the bottle*

MI Who's drunk the half of this? (*Holding up the bottle*)

VELVET . I have, MI It's wonderful mint

MI *Wonderful* mint! It's *cream* de mint! It's *drink*! An' bang
goes three and sixpence . . !

CURTAIN

Act Two: Scene 3

*A corner of the jockeys' changing room at Aintree Along the back is a
fairly highly set-up row of three dusty windows, fogged over, which can
only be seen through by kneeling on a long table just under the windows
In one corner is a door opening inwards, which gives access to the weighing
room There is a door Right onto Course and Right are a row of iron
brackets holding small racing saddles Below is a row of boot boxes. There
is just room for one boot box and bracket and one small saddle Right
hand backstage, the windows and the door or screen give into the weighing
room. The edge of an ironing table protrudes, half hidden, from the left.
Silks lie over it, which are being ironed There is a "bootjack on stand"
on the floor, or even two Boot hooks lie about*

*A big fireplace Left with nursery fire-guard Pants and vests hang on the
guard and a silk or two. Small racing boots are about*

*A JOCKEY is standing before the fire, warming his buttocks He has only
his small pants. His body must be very white, in contrast to his red, tough*

NATIONAL VELVET

face This makes him look much more naked "The Professor"—a valet
—an elderly ex-jockey

Another jockey is kneeling on the table trying to look through the fogged over window He is also naked and in his pants, but he has a white sweater pulled over his shoulder by the arms To give movement, the weighing room door should open once or twice, and a sober-looking, clerkly man might pass through once to go to the stewards' room (Left hand back-stage door) Another jockey, fully dressed and carrying saddle, passes from weighing room and exits through door on to course

WINDOW JOCKEY, filing his nails

In the background, kneeling against a locker, is a lad—a jockey—half dressed for a very much later race (Say the four o'clock) He wears his white breeches but has a pull-over red wool jersey on, with a roll collar up his neck He is tinkering with an old wireless The back is out and is propped against the locker and he has a long screwdriver in his hand

THE PROFESSOR (crossing to a suitcase and picking out a pair of boots)
You ain't going to use that thing here, I've told you before

The lad looks up but says nothing

FIRESIDE JOCKEY Let him have his bit of fun It's his first

WINDOW JOCKEY His first what?

FIRESIDE JOCKEY National Ain't it, baby?

LAD (*shortly*). Go suck yer own thumb Me whole future hangs on Black Wax winning—my eyes ain't no good in this ruddy fog, so I've got to use me ears—see?

PROFESSOR That wireless bin hid away in that locker long's I can remember It's broke too

LAD I can put it right I've got to know wot's happening

PROFESSOR Screeches is all it does Come along, Mr Biddy, do. Are you going to ride the National in your pink skin?

FIRESIDE JOCKEY I've weighed in I've time

PROFESSOR Time? That's what they all say. What about Trotter in '88? He said he'd time

FIRESIDE JOCKEY You old crow Be better if you put your head out of the door and see if the mist's lifting

PROFESSOR walks to the door, but as he gets there it bursts open and in rushes MI with saddle and clothes which he hangs on the hook over the locker

NATIONAL VELVET

PROFESSOR Mind out now!

We hear the roar outside while the door is open

Cotton wool! Ain't been so bad for ten years—not since Len Jackson broke his neck

MI goes back and returns with a suitcase followed by VELVET dressed as a little man, she's already wearing her breeches and boots MI hustles her over to the locker nearest to the door into the weighing room

VELVET They're naked!

MI Keep yer eyes on your knees then

FIRESIDE JOCKEY Come on back, Prof. I'll dress now Wonder if Disher's allright?

WINDOW JOCKEY Dunno Someone said he'd come off Canal Turn

PROFESSOR Guarantee he'll 'ave broken his collar bone again, always breaking it Same as me I used to break mine regular, when I was riding

FIRESIDE JOCKEY So what! (*To MI*) Who's your friend?

MI Tasky Russian chap We're late

FIRESIDE JOCKEY Late you are! You ain't weighed-in yet

WINDOW JOCKEY (*still filing*). Speak English?

MI (*getting on with dressing Velvet*) No good wasting any dope on him Can't speak a bloody word Bolshies have sent him over Ter pick the winnings!

WINDOW JOCKEY You aim to be doing the lady friend to the lady friend all right! Helpless sort of a chap!

MI (*putting the silk jacket over Velvet's head*). Doin' what I'm paid for I only just come up Times are no good down South.

FIRESIDE JOCKEY (*putting on his cap*). Tasky did you say? Why, he's Tasky that's riding the whisky piebald I saw brought in last night. Saw *you* bring it in! Never seen a horse that colour do anything yet, have you, George?

WINDOW JOCKEY (*not looking up*). Turning the Gran' National into a bloody circus! The Piebald, ain't that it's name? Coo, what a name, Piebald!

FIRESIDE JOCKEY That window fogged over or is it dirt?

WINDOW JOCKEY (*turning to scratch it with his nail*) Both, Me Lord.

FIRESIDE JOCKEY. Thought I heard the ambulance bell, Disher ain't come in yet.

NATIONAL VELVET

WINDOW JOCKEY He'll be along He's no ambulance rider.

At this VELVET peers under MI'S arm at her competitor FIRESIDE JOCKEY follows PROFESSOR and exits Left VELVET now stands dressed, and with cap on, and MI reaches above her head to the bracket, and puts the little racing saddle and cloth and numnah over her arm ready to be weighed Then he pushes her down onto the box, sitting with the saddle on her lap, opening the weighing room door cautiously he looks in

MI (through the door) Ready, sir Tasky, sir (Pushing VELVET) Get on in! (Shouting at her as to a foreigner) Get on! They want you for the Chair

WINDOW JOCKEY Thought he didn't understand English?

MI No reason why he shouldn't begin, is there?

Pushing VELVET through door with her saddle on her arm (Loudly). Chair, I said Get on in

He himself remains standing in the open doorway and speaks, presumably to the Clerk of the Scales within PROFESSOR re-enters.

Near enough, sir Yes, sir. An' seven poun' over so they said He don't speak no English, sir (Presumably to VELVET within) Double up, I say! Sit can't you?

PROFESSOR (spitting and polishing a boot) How I 'ates mud Still, it do give 'em something nice and soft to fall onto Oughtn't to have so many broken legs today Way back in '20 I recollects—

(Pause.)

MI • All right. You're done. Come on back.

VELVET emerges.

Proper job, this is Seems more nitwit than not.

Stoops, throws things anyhow into suitcase, leaving it full of things and lid not shut.

Come on now We've not too much time

PROFESSOR: Not much time! Yer've no time!! They've bin in the paddock minutes as it is

He has been standing at the door with his boot He now disappears Left for a moment, leaving only the absorbed and kneeling boy.

MI and VELVET go to the door and are alone for a second.

VELVET: MI—I'm getting sick

NATIONAL VELVET

MI (*to VELVET, as they stand by the door*) Sooner you get out the better You keep outside in the crowd I gotta go fer the horse

A VALET passes VALET exits

See here, Velvet . don't you rush at the horse when you see me lead him out (*Whispering hoarsely*) I oughter go roun' and roun' wiv' him But there ain't no time left Are you listening. Look You see some rails an' some bushes in the middle. It's the paddock. When I make a sign you come an' stand by the bushes in the middle Then I'll jump you up.

VELVET (*slightly astonished*) Jump me up ?

MI (*with a slight grin*). Like the horse was too high fer you I'll take yer overcoat from you

She has it on over her silks—loose on her shoulders

An' I'll lead you out. (*Shaking his head*) An' that's all I kin do for you Come on now. . Half a mo' . . .

MI *exits* VELVET *swallowing hard looks at the LAD.*

LAD (*disgustedly*) My kingdom for a 'orse.

MI *sticks his head round door and pats VELVET'S arm*

MI: Come on now—hurry!

The LAD, now alone, looks around him Lifts the aged wireless, and is about to stand it on the ironing table.

Re-enter PROFESSOR

PROFESSOR Don't you put it down there! I thought I told you .

LAD . Where'll I put it then ?

PROFESSOR . Why don't you go on outside ?

LAD (*with the wireless in his arms, pleadingly*) . You can't see in this fog.

PROFESSOR (*ironing away*) Going to be like that time in '26, when they all ran out at the Canal Turn.

LAD (*pleading*) . I got my shirt an' all on this race.

PROFESSOR: What's your shirt worth ?

LAD . My future 'appiness. If I have a bit of luck me and my Gladys are getting spliced.

PROFESSOR: What horse ?

LAD: Black Wax. He's got a real chance. Don't you think he 'as ?

PROFESSOR: Well as you've got a horse and your Gladys hangs on it. . . . But keep it soft. I hear 'em going down.

NATIONAL VELVET

LAD Going down ?

PROFESSOR Past the stands Then they come back to the start

The LAD places the wireless on a locker and it screeches some music
(*Getting more boots out of a box*) I told you that's all it'd do That wireless don't like talk

LAD Gimme a chance (*More screeching, and music*)

PROFESSOR There's only twenty at the start today Reminds me that time there was forty-two 1928 Tipperary Tim were the only horse wot didn't fall down

The wireless picks up the announcer's voice The LAD settles down, face on hands, on the floor in front of it, and proceeds to listen in. Every time Black Wax is mentioned he re-acts violently

ANNOUNCER I think we have got 'em, I think any time now look out! They're off, they're off, to a very good start Shackle, the favourite, on the far side, got away—they all got away together and they are hurtling away at full burst for a quarter of a mile—a quarter of a mile—till they get to the first fence They look like a squadron of cavalry going at full gallop and they have got about two hundred yards—about a quarter of a mile to go and they're just crossing the Melling Road—there's a shower of peat as they cross it Long Tom is going up in front One horse is badly left Killarney, the Irish horse, is badly left and the rest of them are just coming up to take—take the first fence There is no horse prominent yet—and here the leaders are taking it Long Tom took that jump first, Black Wax is well up amongst the leaders They are all over that first one and they're coming up to the second fence. Long Tom is well in front, is well prominent Black Wax is well up there, and they are all over the second fence We are coming up to the third and this third one is a very stiff one—it is an open ditch and Black Wax has taken the lead Black Wax has taken the lead from Shackle and Long Tom and there is some trouble over there because two horses have fallen

DISHER enters with the DOCTOR DISHER'S collar bone is broken. He sits down and DOCTOR proceeds to strap it up.

They are over the fourth They have crossed the fourth fence—they are now coming up to the fifth fence and after that will be Beecher's Black Wax is still in the lead, Black Wax is up there, Shackle is up there, Killarney is making up ground and most of the leaders are now over the fifth fence, so we take you now to the Canal Turn——

DIFFERENT ANNOUNCER : Approaching Beecher's—Black Wax is still in front with Shackle, Long Tom, Sudbury Town and a whisky-coloured

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piebald amongst them They are all over Beecher's beautifully Black Wax in front, from Shackle, with Sudbury Town there Sudbury Town has gone to the front now He is in front of Shackle as they approach the Canal Turn, Black Wax third and Long Tom fourth Coming up to the Canal Turn drop Sudbury Town is just over a length in front of Shackle Sudbury Town is just in front of Shackle This mist makes it very difficult to see, Sudbury Town has fallen and Shackle is in front Shackle is leading as they come along to the eleventh jump—an open ditch They are just going to take it now They're up and over! And Shackle is leading from Killarney, the Irish horse Shackle is going very well indeed They are coming up to the twelfth jump Black Wax is up amongst the leaders and they're going behind the crowd—you can just see their caps as they go behind the huge crowd, the mist makes it really difficult to see at all And here they come to take it now The leaders are over now—they are going on the far side of the course from us and out in front is Killarney, about two lengths clear from Free State, another Irish horse, with Shackle third, Long Tom fourth, and Black Wax fifth

The wireless softens and the commentary goes on behind MI's dialogue

LAD Black Wax fifth—come on, you lazy bastard—what are you hanging about for?

MI enters in rush

MI Can't see a thing in this bloody mist Just can't see a thing

MI rushes over and crouches down beside the LAD glaring at the wireless as though he can see the race in it

LAD Black Wax!

MI What about The Piebald?

LAD Black Wax! Oh, Gladys, oh boy, oh boy!

MI (*shaking him*). The Piebald? What's happened to The Piebald?

LAD. Dunno.

MI (*dancing with impatience*) Can't you turn it up?

They fiddle.

PROFESSOR: It'll go right off in a minute and a good thing too.

DIFFERENT ANNOUNCER Free State is going very well, and Shackle is going well. They're swinging left handed and they're coming up to the thirteenth fence Number thirteen is an unlucky one, but I hope they get over it They are going right towards it now. Right towards the stand They're coming up to the thirteenth fence now and still in front is Free State. He's taking it now and he's over and they're all over that jump—one came over on the inside on the rails. They're

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all there—there's a blaze of colour coming straight at us out of the must for the fourteenth fence Shackle is in the front—he's taking it now—he's over and he's over in front of the two Irish horses

The wireless comes up again

And they're coming up now to the water jump. The leading horse at the present as they take the water jump is Shackle, the favourite is leading from Free State, Long Tom, Killarney, Black Wax, The Piebald, Sunny River

MI and the LAD are almost fighting with each other over the mention of their respective horses

MI • That's my chap—my chap!

LAD Three-piece suite—that's what I'll be buying for Gladys

ANNOUNCER They have swung left, they've swung left, right round on their second trip out into the country They have crossed the Melling Road They're coming up now to the first of those fences which lead them down to Beecher's There they go, they're just coming up to the first fence now and still in front is Shackle, taking the fence beautifully, jumping very well and he's leading from Killarney Long Tom is lying third, Black Wax is up there, Free State is there, Sunny River is there, and they have taken the next fence They're just coming up to the third fence, the open ditch on the far side going down, number eighteen, and here they come The leaders are well over Shackle is now in the lead from Sunny River Black Wax is lying third, and they've taken the fourth fence on that stretch going away to the country About a hundred yards covers the field at the present moment. There's a loose horse amongst them

PROFESSOR It's loose horses does the mischief You remember the year Royal Mile won.

MI: Shut up—can't you?

PROFESSOR is livid

ANNOUNCER They're coming up to the fifth fence, the one before Beecher's and here they take it. The loose horse running right across them—he's brought Shackle down. The favourite's down and his jockey under him. The Piebald's coming down on top of them. The Piebald's down. And so over to the Canal Turn——

MI: Oh God! Oh God! I can't do nothing.

The strain on MI is terrible to watch. The PROFESSOR takes no notice.

DIFFERENT ANNOUNCER: Coming to Beecher's. Sunny River is just in front Black Wax is there, and Long Tom third. They're all over safely. Sunny River, Black Wax, Long Tom and Killarney are over Beecher's, approaching the next fence, and only just behind them comes

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this incredible-looking horse, The Piebald How his rider kept him clear when Shackle fell no one will ever know

ANNOUNCER Here they come again, just taking the last jump before the Canal Turn Here they come, The Piebald is coming up nicely, taking the Canal Turn jump now—here they come

PROFESSOR Must be quite a rider that little Russian chap

MI is beyond words

LAD Come on, Black Wax—come on! Can't you 'urry?

ANNOUNCER Sunny River is over first, Long Tom running neck and neck, followed by Black Wax, Killarney and Free State—they jumped that together

DIFFERENT ANNOUNCER And so over to the grand stand. There is no change in the order, Sunny River, Long Tom, Black Wax, Sunny River is on the inside and looks to be slightly in the lead They're coming up for the next fence and they're just going to take it They're over it, the leaders are over, with nothing in it at all. The first three—then there's a long gap—The Piebald, is fourth at the present moment Yes, this hundred to one outsider is fourth—his rider keeping him as steady as the rocking horse he looks like They are coming up—they're on the far side of the course, and pretty soon they will be swinging left handed and coming towards us for the finish They have gone about—about three and a half miles—they've just got about under a mile to go This mist's turning into a real fog now. Long Tom is coming again and Black Wax is now leading from Sunny River Black Wax is leading from Sunny River, Long Tom third, Piebald fourth, and then a whole lot of horses have tailed off without much choice

The wireless starts to die away

MI bangs it viciously with his fist

It strengthens again.

They're coming towards us now—they're coming towards us and there are two fences to go—they've got about a half a mile to go from home—two fences only to jump and Black Wax is in the lead. He is not leading by very much but he is in the lead from Long Tom this time and Sunny River has lost his curb. Sunny River has lost his curb But he's over, he's over, he's over in front. He jumped that very well, from Black Wax lying second, Long Tom third The Piebald is lying fourth and that's all we'll worry about for the minute Now the leaders, here they come. There's nothing in it—the three leaders are coming over the last fence Sunny River is over first, Black Wax over second, Long Tom third, now they're riding hard, they've got the whips on and Black Wax is leading them. They've got four

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hundred yards to do on the flat as they come up and Black Wax is leading from Sunny River The Piebald is challenging This hundred to one outsider is challenging They've got about three hundred yards to go and The Piebald seems to be in the lead The Piebald seems to be coming up there—the pink and black cap is coming up Pink and black Black Wax is holding him They've got a hundred yards to go and—it's a neck and neck race—it's a neck and neck race—but it looks as if The Piebald—the hundred to one outsider—will win it and there's the winning post—now looks like . .

The wireless suddenly goes completely dead

PROFESSOR Told you it would go right off

MI The Pie—The Piebald's done it ?

LAD No, he ain't—it's Black Wax

MI *crashes his fist down on the wireless—he's half weeping*

MI I tell you it's The Piebald He was up to the post Somebody must have seen—did nobody see ? Can't somebody tell a feller if his chap won ?

The door is pushed violently from behind, which sends MI half sprawling across the room

MAN *rushing in and stopping short*

MAN (to DOCTOR and to the room in general) Red flag's gone up! They put up the red flag!

MI *is panting and can't speak*

LAD . Red flag! An objection! Blimey!

MAN . Seems like it Chap come over queer

OTHERS (crowding) What objection ? Who was it ?

MI (imploringly) What chap ? Chap did ? What chap ? (Takes a step towards the MAN)

MAN That there Piebald that come in first! Where you bin all day, Percy ?

MI (sickly) I couldn' see I tell you . . I was here listening. . . Oh, my God!

LAD . The Piebald! Black Wax may get it—oh, Gladys!

DOCTOR (finishing) What's the objection about, Sanders ?

MAN Chap dismounted before reaching the unsaddling enclosure. That's what the policeman told me Dismounted my foot He fell off Fainted. Must have hurt himself jumping.

MAN *exits.*

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MI (*to the DOCTOR, imploringly*). Are you going to him then? My chap? Can I come with you, doctor? It's my chap that's hurt himself

DOCTOR (*packing a few things back in his little bag, surgical scissors, cotton wool, etc*). You can come later when I've looked him over. Sister's got to undress him first

MI (*aghast*). Undress . him?

DOCTOR (*finally—to Disher*). There you are, Jim Disher. That's the fourth break I've done on you this twelve month. You better reckon on a let up for a bit

Looking up as the PROFESSOR comes in hurriedly from Left—
Is it me you want?

MI. Undress him. did you say?

PROFESSOR. It's the nurse, doctor. She says to come at once

DOCTOR. Tell her I'm just coming

PROFESSOR (*urgently*). Said I was to ask you to hurry

MI (*imploring*). Doctor .

DOCTOR (*exciting*). You can come round in ten minutes. I'm going now

Exits

Meanwhile the PROFESSOR has crossed the room and opened the door Right that gives onto the course. MI sits slowly down on a chair by the ironing table and buries his head in his hands

PROFESSOR (*at door, looking out*). Objection sustained. There's the green flag going up. It's gone up

The LAD exits at a run Right

I just can't recollect another objection—no I just can't

MI (*seated at table, raises his head, with his fists stretched out and doubled on the table*). The PROFESSOR does not hear at first, he is looking out of the door.

MI (*half whispering*). They've found out. They've found out at once. They would. What's it matter. What's anything matter if she's all right! The little beggar! Oh, the little beggar! God forgive me!

PROFESSOR (*turning in surprise*). You going religious? 'Course you're the winner's chap, aren't you?

MI. The winner! Miracles do happen, don't they?

PROFESSOR. Wonder what went wrong?

Looking across MI's head to the doorway to the Steward's room, which is opening.

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There's the stewards coming! (*Going near MI*) Get up! They'll be wanting you about the objection

MI starts to his feet and casts a look behind him

MI (ducking under the PROFESSOR's arm, and reaching the doorway)
Got to rub the horse down, ain't I? Got to rub the horse.

Exits at a run

From the steward's door come, first the CLERK of the Course at Aintree—a very grand person—and LORD TUNMARSH—(grander still and elderly.)

CLERK (*looking round and speaking to the PROFESSOR*) There's a man in attendance on number four in the last race Have you seen him in here?

PROFESSOR (*respectfully*) Just nipped out this second, sir This very second

LORD TUNMARSH now comes forward out of the doorway, followed by
MITS SCHREIBER *He is a man aged about thirty-seven*

CLERK See if you can find him for me.

PROFESSOR (*exiting*) Right, sir

CLERK (*turning to LORD TUNMARSH, he has glanced out of the door and now pulls it shut*) The crowd's bubbling like a kettle out there, my Lord (*Looking again through a crack in the door*)

SCHREIBER Looks like a free fight round the Tote.

LORD TUNMARSH Is the flag up yet?

CLERK (*peering again and shutting the door again*): Yes. (*He turns back into the room.*)

LORD TUNMARSH Well, now that the objection is sustained definitely here on the course the rest must be referred to London We'll have a special meeting of the N H C 'Straordinary thing how Wetherby's passed it She must have got her licence You got her off all right?

CLERK: Just about I sent for the ambulance even before the doctor came. There was a rush as the stretcher went in and she called out something. But we got her off Somehow The Press has gone mad already.

SCHREIBER. They haven't started yet.

LORD TUNMARSH: Who's gone with her?

CLERK: The doctor couldn't go. He's got two men—one a baddish crash at Valentine's. He sent one of the orderlies. She should be on her way to the hospital by now.

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LORD TUNMARSH I think we should have sent an official Hadn't she a friend or relation with her ?

CLERK No

SCHREIBER But she called out to somebody

CLERK That somebody's hidden himself all right

SCHREIBER And she said nothing ?

CLERK Wouldn't speak, Captain Schreiber. Except that one shout she gave.

LORD TUNMARSH (*meditatively, stroking his moustache, and turning as he goes back into the stewards' room*) If my daughter'd done it I'd be

CLERK Pretty upset, I should think, my Lord!

SCHREIBER (*with a smile*) Upset! I doubt it.

CURTAIN

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Act Three · Scene I

*The board room at Wetherby's Two days later
Afternoon*

A room high up in a London square, probably in a solid Georgian house with an air of the past in the mahogany furniture, the carving over the mahogany doors, the dado, the back of the chairman's armchair, and a certain background of tomes in a shelf and one ancient greeny racing picture
The Chairman Lord Tunmarsh, Wetherby's lawyer Mr Simkin, Committee members the Clerk of the Course at Aintree Captain Joseph Lockhart Little, and Muts Schreiber are standing around the great table with its green cloth Simkin is tall and dry Little, small and dry.

CAPTAIN LITTLE (*lighting his cigarette*) Sickening, this Velvet uproar.

LORD TUNMARSH (*from his chair, without looking round*) I've read none of it Or as little as I could help—I only read *The Times* Is the girl here?

SIMKIN She is downstairs, waiting

LORD TUNMARSH (*looking up—with a gesture*) . Well, gentlemen
They take their seats at the table

SIMKIN *remains standing with his paper*

Will you tell us, Mr. Simkin, our position? Is it a case for prosecution? Is it a case coming under our own laws? How we stand, in fact?

SIMKIN *picking down a large tome from the shelf with a marker already in it.*

It is a yellow calf volume.

SIMKIN: It's quite clear I have it here Attempting to defraud. As to the question of a . . . female . . . it's difficult, of course, to give a

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crisp ruling I should like first to ask M'Lord, that it be understood that we judge the case entirely

LORD TUNMARSH (*sharply*) You're not referring, I hope, to the newspaper hurly-burly? That can have no effect Naturally

SIMKIN No, Mr Chairman No Well . I hardly supposed I have it here (*Thumb in the book*) "Attempting to obtain money under "er . "Obtaining money under" she hasn't "obtained" "Attempting to " that's it *Very* clear (*Looking up*) It's my opinion we can prosecute

CLERK OF THE COURSE Legal, is it?

LORD TUNMARSH (*soberly*) Let's see the girl first She's waiting

MITs A damn fine show she put up What's her real age?

SIMKIN (*dryly, not liking Mits' enthusiastic tone*) Her age is said to be fourteen A romantic under-statement on the part of the Press Might I say, Mr Chairman, before the young woman comes into the room, that I think it would be a pity if any note of admiration be acknowledged during the interview. If indeed any is felt

LORD TUNMARSH (*sipping his glass of water*) I think, Mr Simkin, you can leave that to me Please ask her to come up

SIMKIN (*going to the door and opening it—to someone outside*) . Call her up, Cotton The girl in the waiting room

MITs But if she's fourteen can we prosecute a child of fourteen? Who put her up to do it?

CAPTAIN LITTLE (*when SIMKIN returns*) Apparently nobody

MITs Impossible!

LORD TUNMARSH We shall know better when we see her I'm not prepared, any more than Mr Simkin is, to take it from her that she is fourteen I gather we have been bombarded with inaccurate descriptions of this young woman morning after morning Not that we've any of us read them, but . . .

MITs *Every blinking word, Mr Chairman! I'm a Velvet fan!*

LORD TUNMARSH (*sharply*) Well, keep it to yourself, Mits This is a meeting of the National Hunt Committee, and for myself I feel very differently.

They look round. The door opens.

The men rise, except LORD TUNMARSH who with his hand draws a chair out for VELVET. SIMKIN pushes the chair thus indicated over to the side of the door so that VELVET faces the men and the audience. VELVET wears a red jersey, dark blue wool skirt, a blue coat to match with brass buttons and very childish stub-toed shoes. She has a decent,

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Sunday-going, childish, village appearance At first she sits back into the chair which is rather high in the seat Then, realising that her feet are swinging, she edges forward again so that she is sitting neatly on the extreme edge, her feet now on the ground

LORD TUNMARSH (*after a small pause he is staggered, as are all the men, by her youth*) Good afternoon You are Miss Velvet Brown ?

VELVET (*whose great fear is that she will be sick in a low voice*)
Yes

LORD TUNMARSH (*a bit nonplussed*) I really

MITTS (*heartily to carry off the pause for the frightened child*) Well, was it you all right, riding that Piebald ? It was you, wasn't it, Miss Brown ?

VELVET (*nodding, low*) Me

LORD TUNMARSH (*as severely as he can manage*). What put it into your head, girl, to do a frivolous thing like that ?

VELVET *spreads her two thin hands on her lap nervously and appears to be counting the fingers* She whispers something

What's that ?

VELVET (*suddenly looking up and speaking more clearly*) I knew the horse could do it

LORD TUNMARSH But why *you* riding ? Why d'you want to ride him yourself ? Why not get a professional ?

VELVET. He . . .

LORD TUNMARSH. Yes ?

VELVET (*with a gulp*) : He goes very well for me (*Said quite simply*)
Pause

MITTS (*exploding*) . I should think he does !

LORD TUNMARSH (*with a reproving look*) I think we shall have to ask Mr. Simkin to explain to her . . . just what . . . we feel about the matter

SIMKIN, *who has been sitting, rises with alacrity, paper in hand.*

VELVET *looks up at him innocently, sweetly, obediently. Her lips, part and the gold band gleams.* LITTLE and MITTS *whisper, and LITTLE shakes his head.*

SIMKIN : You being a female (*clears his throat*), and not an accredited male rider . . . come under the heading . . . "Attempting to obtain money under false pretences." It was a . . . for the time being . . . successful deception—upon . . . ah . . . us, Upon Messrs. Wetherby

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and (*more casually*) the committee of the National Hunt It was done to obtain the prize of

VELVET (*quickly and rather firmly*) No No, it wasn't

SIMKIN (*sternly, looking over the edge of his paper*) Why not? You stood to get the prize?

VELVET Yes, sir Yes, I did But it wasn't done for that reason It was done because .

Her voice fails her

SIMKIN Then why was it done?

He thinks he has got her He beats with his finger

We should like to know that

VELVET Because .

She stares beyond them at the chimney pots (at the audience) then low and clear, like a prayer, not to them but to the air

(*Slowly*) the horse jumps lovely and I wanted him to be famous I didn't think of the money when I planned it all.

Slight sensation.

SIMKIN (*with an angry glance at the committee*) . You planned it all! That, Miss Brown, is hard to believe! You are, I understand, a child. You have obtained a false certificate from my . . . er . . . people. From us You posted to Messrs Wetherby an Esthonian clearance and in exchange we forwarded you the usual licence It was a monstrous imposture *How was it done?* (*Finger wagging.*)

VELVET (*looking at him, and replying with her divine obedience*) . There was so much to be done

SIMKIN Precisely There was indeed much done. There were grave impostures and serious deceits from start to finish The money of the public is in our trusteeship We guarantee to the public that this great and famous race . . . into which you have entered so lightly, so mockingly, is a race which is run in such a way that they can put their money on it . . . er . . . safely.

LITTLE (*grinning*) : "Safely's" a bit strong, you know!

SIMKIN (*haughtily*) : Safely up to the limits of the usual chances.

LORD TUNMARSH (*suddenly, to VELVET*) : How old are you?

VELVET . Fourteen, sir. Fifteen next month.

LORD TUNMARSH . Who has helped you in this? We want the names of your friends.

VELVET : Mother knew At the end.

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SIMKIN Your mother knew That is important Your mother is Mrs Brown ?

VELVET My mother was Araminty Potter She swam the Channel once

MITs (*with a whistle of delight*) • Araminty Potter ! What a name when I was a boy ! Swam the Channel breaststroke twenty years ago ! She downstairs ?

VELVET No, sir

MITs : Your father's a

VELVET Butcher, sir

MITs He knew ?

VELVET No, he didn't know Only afterwards, when the race was over

MITs So Araminty Potter married a butcher and got you ! And you've gone and swindled the almighty Wetherby's and won the Grand National

SIMKIN (*intervening, much displeased*) I don't think Mr Chairman, this conduces to her understanding of the situation at all (*Turning to VELVET*) If your father didn't know, Miss Brown (supposing this to be exact) and only your mother knew, then we must look for *other supporters* I should like to begin with the Esthonian clearance How was that got ? Who procured it ?

VELVET (*pausing, thinking, knowing that this must come at length*) . Mi's downstairs. Mi will tell you We knew he would have to

LORD TUNMARSH And Mi is . ?

VELVET (*whispering, despondent*) Mi is Mi Taylor. He . helps my father in the slaughter house.

SIMKIN *stoops to whisper to the chairman, who nods*

LORD TUNMARSH Will you wait downstairs, Miss Brown ? We should like to speak to Mr. Taylor.

VELVET *gets up* MITs *jumps up and holds the door open for her, says through the door*

MITs . Take her down, Cotton Show her down Then we want the man that's waiting. Taylor.

Exit VELVET.

(*Turning, having shut the door*) • She's almost in the cradle !

SIMKIN : Did anyone actually see her on the horse ?

CLERK OF THE COURSE : I did.

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MITTS So did I It's the same, allright.

SIMKIN Without a shadow of doubt ?

MITTS Couldn't make a mistake about those teeth

The door opens and MI is shown in

MI has spat on his pocket comb on the stairs, but it hasn't been much use Hair is erect, red and curly

MI stands just inside the door They do not ask him to sit

SIMKIN Michael Taylor (writing it down on a slip of his note book)

MI Yes, sir

SIMKIN You are Mr Brown's assistant in his business ?

MI Landed there just to do anything Clean the slaughter house, buy sheep, help their ma, and so on

SIMKIN (*increasing his attack*) Well, now, Taylor, I don't need to tell you that an outrage has been committed A legally punishable fraud

MI Yes, sir

SIMKIN This fraud has been ostensibly committed by a child, Miss Velvet Brown. Obviously she could neither have planned it nor carried it through, without help. *What part did you play in all this, Taylor ? (fiercely)*

Pause

I warn you to make no trouble over speaking the truth

Long pause

MI (*simply, and sucking the hollow beside his tooth*). I knew a boy

Pause Suck

This boy knew a boy it was at Lewes races.

SIMKIN (*pencil poised*). Their names ?

MI No I ain't giving you their names There was a whole trail of boys All talkin'. I got a bit of news from each You know what those race boys are . lean up against each other an' jabber I don't even *know* their names. But the upshot was that there was someone knew a fellow coming over that had a clearance from Esthonia Going to ride a horse that come by air and dropped dead at Croydon. So he *had* no horse An' I met him An' I oiled up the fellow an' got his clearance He's gone back now He never thought no more about it. Then I just posted the clearance an' got the Licence. See ?

SIMKIN: And this boy from Esthonia ? Has he left the country ?

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MI Took the hoof off the horse and took it back

LORD TUNMARSH Not much chance, I gather, of getting at him
The only culprit I think, Sumkin, is here in the room

SIMKIN So it seems, Taylor, that the whole of this regrettable affair
has been engineered by you and by you alone ?

MI (*with a brushed-away half-chuckle*). No

SIMKIN • No ?

MI No, sir There's Velvet Velvet thought out the thing It
come to her It come to her, like the horse did, out of the sky.

CAPTAIN LITTLE • How did the horse come to her ?

MITs Why she got it for a shilling in the village raffle Didn't
you read about it ? There was yards in the *Express*

SIMKIN (*frowning*) Is that so, Taylor ?

MI Yes, sir Down in the village anybody'd tell you It was a
farmer stuck it up for a raffle. Got nine pound ten for it Velvet took
a ticket, and when she won it she got moony about it, kind of religious
Then one day, when I seen it jump a five foot gate, all by itself, an'
make away—I said—kind of careless (*with a wave of his hand*)—
“Make a Grand National jumper, that would!”—Then . . . Velvet
. she never let up on that She just went on.

LORD TUNMARSH . It seems not possible! I never heard such a tale!

MI (*earnestly*) • It's no tale It's just Velvet, I know what's in her
blood because my old father . .

SIMKIN (*dryly and disgustedly*) Your father ?

MI My father was old Dan Taylor, an' he was a Channel trainer
He trained Araminty (that's her mother) to swim the Channel. An'
she swum it. Against the tide on a terrible dirty morning . .

MITs • Yes—it *was* a swim!

MI : Then that's her mother. Velvet, for all she's such a sickly bit,
she's like her She'll sit on a horse like a shadow and put her soul into
it. She's got little hands like pianner wires I never see such a creature
on a horse!

LORD TUNMARSH (*pause*): What are you, Taylor ? A professional
rider ?

MI (*looking away and speaking low*): I can't ride.

Sensation.

CAPTAIN LITTLE : You can't ride, Taylor ?

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MI Never bin on a horse.

He looks away still This is an old grievance

Pause.

SIMKIN (*clearing his throat*) Well, gentlemen, we've heard something of *how* it was done—It remains now to decide broadly on our course of action Had this fall of the rider not taken place, had she not by it been disqualified on the technicality of dismounting before reaching the unsaddling enclosure, had the prize money of £7,560 (not to speak of a Cup worth two hundred pounds) been awarded as it would have been if no objection had been lodged, then this man Taylor stood to gain either the whole sum, or . .

MI (*explosive*) Here! What are you getting at! I'm no thief! The money'd a bin Velvet's! She's the owner, isn't she? I did no more'n believe in her an' talk to her an' get her the clearance. She's the little wonder 'ats done it all! It would a bin her money an' I would a seen that she kept it! Her mother knew about it, and she's no sof' chicken! Velvet an' me we was so busy pulling it off we never thought about the money It was the horse It was all the horse "Putting the horse in history," she called it, and she kept thinking it. You could see her think it, with her eyes shining—an' her stomach heaving pretty often too She's a terrible vomiter *Me* the money! What's the use of seven thousand pounds to me?

LORD TUNMARSH (*dryly*). Seven thousand pounds, Taylor, is always useful.

MI. I shouldn't know what to do with it What'd I do? It would give me the itch

LORD TUNMARSH The whole story is so strange. There seems to be a commotion outside, Mits?

Exit MI

MITs (*going to window and looking down*): Crowds of people. Thick on the pavement

He throws up the window The shouts and cries are heard. He leans further out, then pulls his head back.

LORD TUNMARSH (*cocking his ear*). What's that they're saying?

MITs (*grinning*). They're shouting. "Velvet Velvet." (*Leaning out again and turning again.*) "Gran' National Velvet!" Crowds down there . . . yelling their heads off

MI *bursts in at the door, bringing VELVET with him.*

MI. They want the child! You stay here, Velvet! You're higher up! You're better up here!

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET *stands wondering in the room* MI *with his back to the door*
MITS *(at the window)* Police are coming! Look Mounted police
VELVET *(running across to the window)* Let me look! Oh, let me look!

She hangs out of the window. Tremendous roar at sight of her
MITS *(pushing her back)* Now you've done it!

LORD TUNMARSH *(as MITS shuts the window down)* But what's the matter? What do they want?

MI *(grinning)* They're all over the windows downstairs Your fellows are putting the shutters up I heard 'em shout as clear as clear — "You tick her off and we'll cut your livers out!"

MITS What ticking Velvet off! You see, my girl, you belong to the people now and they won't let us do you down! Come on, we'll have to get you out of here. *(To SIMKIN)* You know this place Haven't you a fire exit?

SIMKIN *(disappointedly putting his papers together)* Outside the door on the landing The glass door facing you goes out onto the roof Is the committee's meeting adjourned, then, M'Lord?

LORD TUNMARSH I suggest firstly that Captain Schreiber gets the child away

MITS *(taking VELVET's hands in both his and standing with them)* Don't you listen to 'em grunting *We're all for you!* Your name's going to be written across the sky like somebody's pills The public's after you an' they'll go on till they're flogged tired, an' then, they'll drop you! You're going to have a queer kind of hot air from the newspapers puffing round you What you got to do is to try an' keep life just the same for yourself I bin all round the world and I know Don't let any of us find you one of these days with a hard face and a dirty bit of cigarette and your nerves all gone to blazes Mi . what's your name . look after her! Now, come on now, both of you . *(grinning wickedly)* that's the committee's finding! You'll hear no more! You'll see! Well, when do you want to go? Now?

VELVET . Go? Oh, yes *(To MI)* Don't we, Mi?

CURTAIN

NATIONAL VELVET

Act Three : Scene 2

In the cottage living-room

It is just before supper VELVET *sitting at centre table absorbed in her box of horses, with papers and scissors around her* *The things are on a tray (so that she can get them off easily later)*

EDWINA *(on sofa or low chair, with half-opened mail around her)* *reading letters*

MEREDITH *stands by the dresser, on which is an old tin box (an old Army despatch box type, with rusty lid standing open)* *Or she can be kneeling on the floor, sorting it over*

There's a murmur of crowd off

EDWINA *(speaking with some heat, as though she had already been contradicted, her face turned to VELVET)* Well *Anybody'd call it a love letter!* Anybody who knew!

VELVET *(head down looking into her shell box)* How can it be a love letter if I've never met him?

EDWINA It begins "*Divine Equestrian*" I'd like to know what more you want!

VELVET I don't want anything, or any of them

MEREDITH *(looking up)* Not when two of them actually ask you to marry them?

MI enters Right

MI *Barmy.* You'd be surprised how many *barmy* people there are

He exits Left.

EDWINA *(continuing to read aloud)* This one says "I worship the crown of your head". . .

VELVET *(with a shudder)*: Oh . . . *don't*, Edwina.

EDWINA *(teasingly)*. " . . and the soles of your feet . . ."

TEDDY *comes in from back stage (under the stairs where the front door is) with a great ornamental basket of flowers and a handful of letters.*

TEDDY: Hey . . . Velvet! Found this . . . with a messenger . . . couldn't get through the crowd . . . It's from the Mayor of Brighton, and the Aldermen. And the postman gave me these letters—when he knew I was going to come pushing through. . .

NATIONAL VELVET

Standing near VELVET at the table, and looking down at her with wonderment

You back at those bits and pieces again after all the to do! Wouldn't the reporters give something to know that! They'd make it a story!

VELVET (*lifting her head innocently*) You won't tell 'em, will you, Teddy?

MEREDITH People nearly all gone now, aren't they? Outside? I looked through the curtain upstairs

TEDDY Only a few hanging about now. It's bin like the sack murder. Crowd staring up at the windows. There was a lot brought their sandwiches an' eat them outside. Place is littered. You'll be glad to be outdoors again. My word it's been a real siege.

EDWINA Fun, wasn't it! Velvet winning the Grand National and then us all living for a whole day with the blinds down an' eating cold salt beef. Cold salt beef was all there was in the house and mother wouldn't let father go down to the shop for fear he'd start giving interviews!

MEREDITH "You don't no one leave the house!" she said

EDWINA . an' us all grumbling and yawning and moping in here all day!

TEDDY (*to VELVET*) Don't you want the letters?

VELVET Edwina's opening them for me. (*Nervously*) What's that noise? Someone talking?

TEDDY *pulling open the kitchen door cautiously . . . it had been open a crack. Listening awhile.*

TEDDY It's your mother (*Listening again, then closing door.*) She's sent a lady reporter to the right-about. I can hear her! "In England," says she, "we got rights."

MEREDITH Mother'd like to go out with a broom an' sweep 'em all away.

TEDDY (*admiringly*) Your mother's a One! Seen your face in all the papers, Velvet?

VELVET *looks up, then goes on with her horses again*
There's one says "Brown Family totally surrounded" 'An a picture of you.

MEREDITH: It's all in here. I got nearly everything.

TEDDY (*going nearer*): What's all that in that trunk?

MEREDITH: I'm making a collection. Velvet doesn't take any interest; but she will when she picks up. I got photographs and some news-

NATIONAL VELVET

papers and they printed her face on a handkerchief at Woolworths already (*She holds up a cheap flimsy square*)

MRS BROWN (*appearing in door right*) Lay table (*Seeing Teddy*)
How's the street, Teddy? Getting empty?

TEDDY Pretty well Someone told me they ran a special bus line
I *seen* the extra police

MRS BROWN Terrible—the crowds I thought we'd all have to go
to an hotel, one time But it's blown over Everything does in the
end It's not but what I'm not proud of Velvet, Teddy, but she done
her best up at Aintree, an that oughter had been enough What gets
me is this gaping and handshaking and curiosity as though she was a
black savage caught on the beach

TEDDY. Did they do that to you? When you waded out of the
water? After you'd swum it?

MRS BROWN They'd no modesty (*As she disappears.*) Lay table
Exit Right

EDWINA Whose turn?

MEREDITH Yours

TEDDY I'll be going (*To Velvet*) I just wanted to look at you,
Velvet It doesn't seem you can be the same. Couldn't you just tell
me what you felt like? What did you feel like, Velvet?

VELVET (*looking up at him*) The worst was I'd got my mouth open
an' couldn't shut it, because the wind had dried it

TEDDY I'm off Coming out, Edwina? After supper?

EDWINA I will if they're gone If mother lets me

MEREDITH Have a chocolate, Teddy? (*Holding up a huge box with
ribbon*) Captain Schreiber sent them to Velvet.

TEDDY (*looking back*). Can I, Velvet?

EDWINA. She can't eat 'em! They make her sick.

*She gets up as she speaks and goes to the dresser drawer and gets
out the tablecloth.*

(*Calling to him.*) I'll be down . . . if I can . . .

Exit TEDDY.

EDWINA *goes to the table, flicking the cloth open as she goes, saying . . .
Move, Velvet!*

VELVET *begins slowly to gather her things together.*
Get up!

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET *lifts her tray and all off the table and transfers them to a stool and sits down on the floor beside them*

EDWINA *lays the cloth and gets the cruet stands, knife tray, and finally a covered small tray of knives and forks from dresser drawer As she is doing this*

Enter MI, from Right.

MEREDITH (*looking at MI*) Whur's Jacob ?

MI • Bin out all night I just washed him

MEREDITH Where's he drying ?

MI (*as he passes her, puts his finger to his lips, confidentially*) In the linen cupboard Bottom shelf

MEREDITH (*stooping over her trunk again*) Mother'll find you out

MI Even chances she don't (*Pause*) She give me ten shillings this morning To git me teeth out of pawn

VELVET (*surprised*) You put 'em in again ?

MI Had to Up in Liverpool After they took you off to the hospital Hadn't nothing though I did get me ride back free.

VELVET How is it they're always so valuable, Mi ?

MI Mass o' gold My old Dad got 'em done "You always got money on you if you got gold in your mouth," he said I can raise ten shilling on them most towns

VELVET Yes, an' you whistle better without them.

Enter MRS BROWN, carrying a large tray with things steaming.
Where's Donald ?

MRS BROWN (*as she carries tray to dresser*) I've sat him by the kitchen fire He's got his nose running.

DONALD'S VOICE • It's not

MRS BROWN (*over her shoulder*) • You go back and set down

They all come one after the other to the table They sit, and MRS. BROWN helps them in heaped plates from the sideboard.

(*Handing plate to MI*) • Give that to him, Mi An' leave the kitchen door open so's I can see him.

Exit MI, with plate.

(*To VELVET, who hasn't moved*): Come on now, Velvet. Your plate's helped

VELVET *gets up slowly and comes to her place at table.*

NATIONAL VELVET

MI (*reappearing in doorway*) He needs his nose blowing before he eats

MRS BROWN He can blow his own He's got his handkerchief stuck in his waist

MI An' he says, "Is it castle puddings?"

MRS BROWN: Tell him it is.

MI *returns and sits at table*

MEREDITH You never used to tell us

MRS BROWN Times I don't do what I always did

They are now all eating

(*As she sits, glancing into kitchen through door*) You stay put by that fire, Donald

DONALD'S VOICE The meat's sour

MRS BROWN What's that?

DONALD'S VOICE (*very loud*) It's *sour*, I say

MRS BROWN (*to EDWINA*) If he's got capers put on his, take them off, D'wina.

EDWINA *goes to the door and stoops through it She jumps back angrily*

EDWINA: He's *spat* at me!

DONALD'S VOICE (*anxiously*) Spit came out Cabbage is *stringy*

MRS BROWN He's possessed Shut the door, Edwina Get the jelly, Meredith It's there behind the pickles

She points over her shoulder to the dresser MERRY gets the pot of jelly

They all eat

MEREDITH (*sitting down again*), Father's late.

MI I seen him down the village

MRS BROWN: He'll be in

MI: Did you know Donald got out?

MRS. BROWN: What's that?

MI Early this morning, By the fence he was. The reporter the other side of the fence was saying (*mimicking*) "Tell me now, like a nice little chap . . ." an' Donald looked at him an' he said, "Tell you what?" "Tell me about your sister, Velvet She's a nice girl, isn't she?" An' Donald says, "She wasn't a nice girl larse July . . . She didn' pull the plug after she sat down . . . mother *said* she wasn' nice."

MRS. BROWN. There's no end to what he'd say once he's asked.

NATIONAL VELVET

MI • An' the reporter said, "Tell me something more about her," an' Donald begun about how she didn't wash her neck, when I caught him.

MRS BROWN You did ?

MI (*modestly*). Well, I caught him . . . one An' I stuck him back through the window

MRS BROWN (*rising*) I'll take your father's back to the oven.

She exits with his piled plate by kitchen door VELVET reaches for her shell box again and tilts her chair sideways with them in her lap

MI Put your plate in, Velvet, into yer mouth Yer father'll be in any minute

VELVET (*putting in the plate with both hands*) It'll be funny when they're straight

MI What straight ?

VELVET My teeth I won't feel the same

MI Nor you won't be the same But it'll be no loss

Re-enter MRS BROWN.

Velvet's not wanting her teeth straight

MRS BROWN Velvet's not got to choose Here's your father!

Enter MR BROWN gaily

(*To MR BROWN*) I've put yours back in the oven

MR BROWN (*very affable*) • Just bin with a gentleman from the pictures. He stopped me in the street Come all the way from Elstree in Essex, fur collar an' a big Daimler an' all. Come all the way to ask our Velvet to pose for 'em He's down at the Black Horse I said I'd see you first.

VELVET looks up

MRS BROWN (*to MERRY*) Fetch your father's plate

Exit MERRY to kitchen, and almost immediately returns holding hot plate in dishcloth so as not to burn her hand She sets down plate and exits back to kitchen

(*Laconically to MR. BROWN*) • She going ?

MR. BROWN (*taking the plate and slowly sitting down*): Says he's sending for her tomorrow

MRS. BROWN (*sitting square*) Well . . . *had she ought ?*

MR. BROWN (*uneasily . . . he is longing to have it happen to VELVET*): ~~Hear~~ that, Velvet ? What do you feel about it yourself ?

VELVET (*carelessly*): Think it might be fun.

NATIONAL VELVET

MR BROWN (*eating a mouthful, half irritably to MRS BROWN*) · There y'are! An' I don' see any harm! He wants the horse too He's sending down a horse-box

VELVET (*looking up*) Wants the horse?

MR BROWN. Says he's made for a film, that horse

VELVET (*swiftly and with surprising finality*) Can't have the horse.

MR. BROWN (*ceasing to eat*) · What's that?

VELVET (*with a firmness never heard before*) Piebald on the films! He seems to forget!

MR BROWN (*taken aback*) · What's he forget?

VELVET (*proudly*) That *that's* the horse that won the National

MR BROWN (*with unaccustomed patience*) That's why he wants him, Velvet

VELVET (*standing up behind the table and facing audience. Getting slowly and tremblingly worked up, during this*) I'll go. It won't be half bad for us all to go and see me doing things on the curtain an' the band playing and us sitting looking. But The Piebald! He doesn't know, he wouldn't know He's out there in that field, steady an' safe He believes in me I wouldn't let him in for a thing that he couldn't understand He's not like 'a human He doesn't know (*tears*) how to be funny (*increased tears*) and he shan't learn!

She faces the audience with tears streaming down

MR BROWN *Well!*

VELVET (*continuing—with a sob or two*) I've read about horses . . . (*sob* horses that has won (*sob*) an' they write about them n-nobly's though they were statues Now can you write about a horse n-nobly if it goes on the films?

MR. BROWN (*leaning forward and speaking with as much earnest patience as he can muster*): But what'll they be writing about your horse more'n they have done?

VELVET (*shaking her head, gulping*): Not in the papers! Not in the papers! (*Taking a pull at herself*) Mother . . . mother lights the fire with those! In books! Big books! Roll-of-Honour books where they put down the winners an' call them the Immortal Manifesto.

MR. BROWN (*shouting*): The Immortal *what?*

VELVET: Manifesto. N'how can they call him the Immortal Piebald if he goes on the . . .

MR. BROWN (*shouting*) · More like call you the Immortal Velvet!

NATIONAL VELVET

VELVET (*hysterical*) *Me ' That's nothing ' I'm nothing* If you could see what he did for me! he burst himself for me N'when I asked him he burst himself more N'when I asked him again—he—doubled it He tried near to death, he did, I'd sooner have that horse happy than go to heaven!

MRS BROWN Behave yourself, Velvet! Stop them tears an' that nonsense You know what you are You better go an' warm your feet an' take your mind off before you come to the pudding An' you, Mi, you go upstairs and take a cloth You'd better be wiping up where you put Jacob You go up an' help him, Edwina

Exit MI, followed by EDWINA During this speech MR and MRS BROWN are standing in the circle of the albert lamp on the dresser, lit by its limit of light MR BROWN'S untouched and piled-up plate lies on the dresser VELVET goes over to the island of firelight, which encircles and isolates her Thus they are in two separate worlds

(*To MR BROWN*) An' you, William, you leave that child to me It's heady what she's drunk it's a kinda wine an' she's too young fer it You leave her level, you leave her to get on with life That child's got something you don't value ser much, William! That child's more mine than all the rest!

MR. BROWN Now Araminty *Now ' Times you get carried away I valued you all right once, didn't I ?*

MRS BROWN Yes, you did, William, or . . . maybe it was the pop and squeak around me ?

MR BROWN Don't you go an' cut queer with me over this! I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels, sometimes This living in the middle of fame's upsetting It's bin like them sweepstakes you read of break up the home.

MRS BROWN You go an' tell the gentleman *No*, William. You tell him from me Nothing's going to break up this home not even if you loose your head. But it'll make it easier if you keep it.

MR. BROWN (*looking at her then suddenly*): Will you keep my dinner hot? (*Makes for door.*)

MRS BROWN (*standing, looking after him, speaking so that he can hear just the first sentence as he goes*) • You always was a nice chap, William, when it comes to grips Ony (*he goes—she says to herself*) I'm ser buried under me fat (*Here MI enters and stands half behind her.*)—I'm half ashamed to tell you so.

NATIONAL VELVET

Half turns and sees MI, and knows he has heard She adds, half to MI and half to herself

Tell you something Love don't seem dainty on a fat woman

Pause

What you got huddled against your chest, Mi ?

MI holding The Tatler tight against his chest and looking past MRS BROWN to VELVET sitting on the floor who gives a half sob among her dying tears Nodding to VELVET

MI What's she always saying about the thick paper weeklies ? Eh Velvet! Turn round this way! You look! I got something for you (*Throws The Tatler to her onto the floor*) You take an' look at that!

Puts his hand on MRS BROWN'S shoulder as she piles up the dirty plates on the dresser He turns her to look at VELVET They both watch her VELVET reaches for The Tatler where it has fallen and opens it in the middle listlessly. Another half sob

(*Impatiently*) Not in the middle, Velvet! Where's your pride! (*She looks nearer the beginning.*)

VELVET suddenly ecstatic MRS BROWN starts to carry the tray out, but pauses with the tray as she passes her to look at her beatific face

VELVET: The front page! The front page special! Oh, Mi . Oh, Mi . it's come at last! The Piebald . on thick, shiny paper! He's taken his place among 'em! We've

MI goes to her

. *put him into History*

MI and VELVET stand together with The Tatler open and gaze at the big front page

CURTAIN

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

A PLAY OF THE SEA

BY

Jan de Hartog

C A S T

The Characters

Of the Crew of the Steamer "The Young Nelly"

JORIS KUIPER, <i>Captain</i>	Jan De Hartog
"CHIEF" DAVELAAR, <i>1st Engineer</i>	Frederick Piper
<i>(By permission of Ealing Studios, Ltd)</i>	
MEYER, <i>Mate</i>	Danny Green
RICHTERS, <i>Ship's Doctor</i>	Michael Clarke
HENKY, <i>Messroom Boy</i>	Philip Hillman

Of the Passengers

THE RABBI	Abraham Sofaer
FIRST JEW	Alfred Hirst
SECOND JEW	Laurence Hastings

Of the Outside World

BRUINSMA, <i>Captain of the "Amsterdam"</i>	Noel Morris
WILLEMSE, <i>Ship's Doctor of the "Amsterdam"</i>	Noel Johnson
THE CONSUL IN SOUTH AMERICA	Anthony Bazell
OFFICER OF SOUTH AMERICAN MILITARY POLICE	Donald Ross
THE CLERGYMAN	Christopher Steele
THE DUTCH NAVAL OFFICER	Bryan Coleman
THE AMERICAN NAVAL OFFICER	Ian Howard

First presented at the Embassy Theatre on Tuesday, November 27th,
1945

Produced by ANTHONY HAWTREY.

All applications for performing rights in this play should be addressed
to the author's agents, Messrs Christopher Mann, Ltd., 140 Park Lane,
W 1

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in the Captain's cabin of the steamer
The Young Nelly

Time : Summer 1938.

ACT I

As the ship is lying in a South American port.

ACT II

~~A month~~ and a half later, just off the United States coast.

ACT III

Four days later, on the high seas

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

Act One : Scene I

The old-fashioned Captain's cabin in an old-fashioned tramp steamer, a bunk to the left, a settee to the right, in the centre, backstage, a door, which if opened reveals a life-boat hanging in davits. Underneath the bunk drawers, in the bunk a porthole, above the bunk a clock. Between the bunk and the door a washstand, between the door and the settee a medicine cupboard, between the door and this cupboard the framed photo of a woman and two children looking at the lens of the camera as if it were the muzzle of a gun.

It is a warm bright summer day in South America, late summer 1938. As the curtain rises, DR RICHTERS, a young man, in shirt-sleeves and with a soft straw hat pushed back on his head, is fussing about and whistling a sailor's song that on the stage can only be whistled. The seat of the settee is pulled up and so reveals a chest out of which the DOCTOR takes his belongings—crumpled shirts, tangled ties, shoes covered with mildew, and piles them on the table standing in the middle of the room—clearly he is changing to another cabin. In the background, harbour noises, whirring of winches, rattling of chains, and from time to time hoarse male voices crying out from ship to shore.

The DOCTOR stops whistling as he fishes the remnants of a tropical helmet out of the chest. How proud he was when he bought it! Now it is battered and out of shape. He takes off his straw hat and puts the helmet in its place, but before he has been able to look at himself in the little mirror over the washstand, he takes it off hurriedly because someone has entered. It is HENKY, the messroom boy, with a steaming jug in his hands, a small thin brat of a boy with a mousy face, about fifteen years of age.

HENKY · Doctor, your water

DOCTOR (*without looking up*) · Fine. Open the washstand, will you? Is it hot?

HENKY : As hell, Doc

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

DOCTOR Good

As HENKY opens the washstand and takes shaving things out of the small cupboard over it, the DOCTOR goes on fussing about and whistling

HENKY (*holding up a shaving brush*) This your brush or the Captain's?

DOCTOR (*without looking up*) Any hairs on it?

HENKY No

DOCTOR The Captain's

HENKY And which soap?

DOCTOR We share the soap

HENKY Oh! Aren't you afraid of getting beard fever?

DOCTOR What the hell is that?

HENKY No kidding! You a doctor, and don't know what beard fever is?

DOCTOR No idea

HENKY Pimples! All over your face. You get them after using another man's shaving things. Fat Toby used the cook's brush once, the next day they had the beard fever, both of them.

DOCTOR My God. And what did they do about it?

HENKY. Tar

DOCTOR What?

HENKY. Tar. They tarred their faces. That's the only cure.

DOCTOR Ha, ha! That's a good one, Henky. I'll remember that for the *Lancet*. And if I get a prize, you shall have half. Here (*gives him the tropical helmet.*) That's to be going on with.

HENKY: That hat? . No kidding. .

DOCTOR Go on, take it. First class tropical helmet, cost me twenty-four bucks, and I only wore it once, in front of the mirror, in the shop.

HENKY (*trying the hat on in front of the washstand mirror*): Lumme! What a hat! (*The thing falls down over his ears*) You don't think it's just a scrap on the large side, do you?

DOCTOR: Let's have a look. (*Puts the helmet on one side.*) Now, kid, you look like a king. Go ashore with that hat on, and see what sex appeal you'll have.

HENKY: Oh, I don't need a hat for that.

DOCTOR. Really! I should take care here in South America if I were you. There are many things between heaven and earth that are

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

worse than beard fever Here! Beautiful tropical shoes First quality
What's the size of those flat feet ?

HENKY I don't know, doctor, but they fit me to a tick

DOCTOR How do you know that ?

HENKY Oh, well . I just thought so

DOCTOR Now I understand where my brown shoes have gone to!
You dirty thief, you!

HENKY But, doctor! How can you say such a thing ?

DOCTOR How else could you know that my shoes fit you, you
mongrel

HENKY I swear you, doc, that that I felt it It was just my
intwishun

DOCTOR No nonsense, Henky I don't mind a joke, but I want
those brown shoes back Bring them here at once

HENKY Could I keep these ones, then ?

DOCTOR To hell with the damn things, I want my brown shoes
back, and like—— What ?

*He has noticed WILLEMSE, a lean smiling gentleman in tropical dress,
who has watched the scene for some time, standing in the doorway*

WILLEMSE (*looking at the muddle*) What's going on here ? Looking
for a collar stud ?

DOCTOR Willemse . ?

WILLEMSE (*comes in and slaps him on the shoulder*) Hulllo, lady-
killer Rather unexpected, eh ?

DOCTOR What where do you come from ?

WILLEMSE Take it easy I'm lying in the harbour with my tub,
just like you

DOCTOR . The *Amsterdam* in here ? You're crazy

WILLEMSE The *Amsterdam* all right. Just by the oil docks. *Pièce
de résistance* of the harbour Only a cow

DOCTOR . Marvellous! Henky, scram and get two drinks!

HENKY (*who in the meantime has tucked three ties under his shirt*) .
Two nice ones ? From the Captain's bottle ?

DOCTOR . Are you crazy ? Think the whole ship is looting ? From
the pantry and better—— Wait a minute! What's that you've got
under your shirt ?

HENKY : Under my what ?

DOCTOR Here! (*Seizes him*)

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

HENKY Mamma!

DOCTOR Shut up! (*To Willemse*) Dr Willemse, what's your diagnosis of the tumour this patient has on his chest?

HENKY Now look here, if you think I've nothing else to do

DOCTOR Whaw! (*Kindly to Willemse*) Yes, doctor?

WILLEMSE My diagnosis isn't yet formed, colleague, but I would advise immediate operation

DOCTOR That's right! (*Thrusts his hand into Henky's shirt*)

HENKY Mammaaaa !

DOCTOR (*who has extracted the ties*) Aha! A beautiful case of tie inflammation (*Kicks Henky out of the room*) Get out, you thief! (*Calls after him*) And don't forget the drinks! (*To Willemse*) The most pronounced Lombroso child I ever met in all my life But now sit down Have a cigarette Do you know, I thought I was seeing a ghost (*Gives him a dig in the ribs*) You are real, aren't you?

WILLEMSE (*thumping him back*) As real as my cherry brandy, my boy You remember? Still five bottles left

DOCTOR My goodness! That's what you might call a man's work ahead We— (*Sees the clock*) No, as late as that?

WILLEMSE (*wrist-watch*) I make it five to twelve

DOCTOR Damn it! Then I'll have to hurry, otherwise hell will break loose You don't mind? (*Goes on putting his things together hurriedly*)

WILLEMSE Hell from whom?

DOCTOR From the old man

WILLEMSE Is he such a man-eater?

DOCTOR Ough! If he weren't a Christian, he would be (*Stumbles*) Damn!

WILLEMSE. What the hell are you in such a hurry for?

DOCTOR Moving, man

WILLEMSE Really? To another ship?

DOCTOR Another ship! Another cabin.

WILLEMSE: You weren't so badly off here, I should say It almost looks like a captain's cabin

DOCTOR. And that's what it is Charming residence, what?

WILLEMSE For an old tub like this . . . But how do you come to live here?

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

DOCTOR Oh, stop it I've been camping here for over two months with the Captain

WILLEMSE Really

DOCTOR What do you expect with one hundred and forty-six passengers aboard and only four cabins? Hell, where did I put my trouser press?

WILLEMSE One hundred and forty-six passengers in four cabins?

DOCTOR Emigrants If you can just be patient for one minute, I'll tell you everything about it

HENKY *enters with a small tray and two glasses on it*
That's a good boy Be careful, be careful! *(Makes room on the table)*
Do you know where my trouser press is?

HENKY. Trouser press?

DOCTOR Yes A big wooden thing like that with screws

HENKY I don't know Why don't you look under my shirt? Or behind my ears?

An OFFICER of the Military Police enters and salutes.

OFFICER Is the Captain here?

DOCTOR No, sir The Captain is ashore Did you want to speak to him?

OFFICER Message from the Commander-in-Chief Where can I find the Captain?

DOCTOR I don't know, sir He went ashore about an hour ago, said he would be back at half-past eleven That means he'll be here any minute

OFFICER I'm sorry, I can't wait Then we'll have to do it without warning Thank you, gentlemen *(He disappears after an impressive salute)*

HENKY follows him.

DOCTOR *(to WILLEMSE)* Now what does that mean?

WILLEMSE "Then we'll have to do it without warning." He's got something up his sleeve

DOCTOR Could he have come to arrest someone?

WILLEMSE They don't use soldiers for that over here

DOCTOR. A soldier, was he?

WILLEMSE. And how First Lieutenant of the Military Police.

DOCTOR. The Captain would be away just now

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

WILLEMSE Where is he anyhow ?

DOCTOR Ask me another At the pilot's office, I believe This morning as we came in we were witnesses of a collision

WILLEMSE And what's your cargo ? Only those emigrants ?

DOCTOR Yes

WILLEMSE No contraband ?

DOCTOR Not our Captain Didn't I tell you ? He's a Christian

WILLEMSE What sort ? Puritan ?

DOCTOR Some sort of his own The sort Nero used to throw to the lions, I suppose But if he had thrown our old man, he would have had the surprise of his life And so would the lions

WILLEMSE And these passengers, they haven't got anything on their conscience ?

DOCTOR Get along Those miserable Jews

WILLEMSE Jews ? Refugees ?

DOCTOR Yes Anyhow, we'll soon know Those South Americans are full of operatic tricks . And I'll have to shave too Oh, damn, your health !

WILLEMSE Cheerio !

As they drink, cries are heard outside, drawing rapidly nearer They listen, taken aback, glasses in hand HENKY stumbles in.

HENKY Doctor ! Oh, d-d-Doctor ! The passengers !

The shouting has come very near now Different voices are heard, lamentations, protestations, cries of terror The DOCTOR and WILLEMSE hurry to the porthole to the left, and what they see there makes them catch their breath

MATE MEYER (*shouting off stage*) Captain, Captain ! (*Enters a fat man of fifty with a childish, drunkard's face*) Captain ! Isn't the Captain here ?

DOCTOR . For Christ's sake, what's going on ?

MEYER : The Captain must come ! They won't let them in !

WILLEMSE Who ? The Jews ?

MEYER : The Captain ! I want the Captain at once ! They are kicking them back ! Soldiers are driving people back aboard ship !

In the middle of the tumult a rifle shot cracks and a piercing cry rings out. For one second there is a terrified silence, then panic breaks loose. The THREE OFFICERS rush out. HENKY hides behind the door.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

MEYER (*off stage*). Hell and blazes! Hengst! Fruithof! Davelaar! Stop it! Make those soldiers stop! Call off those people! Stop that rush! Damn you! (*A shrill yelp is heard above the tumult MEYER yells*) The hatches! Close the hatches! They'll be smashed to pieces!

Then, as the panic reaches its height, the CAPTAIN'S whistle rings out piercingly

CAPTAIN KUIPER (*off stage, with quiet force*) Stop there! (*Whistle*) Stop!

The panic subsides Only a woman keeps on wailing in the depths, and somewhere a child whines KUIPER goes on

Fruithof! Paarlberg! (*Answer from below*) To the hatches, both of you! Mind there's no crush! Everyone take his turn and go quietly! (*Whistle*) Davelaar, Hengst! (*Answer from below*) Go down below! Everybody to his bunk till further orders (*Whistle*) Bo'sun!

His orders go on, but are drowned by the hurried entry of the two
DOCTORS HENKY, who has left his hiding place on hearing the
CAPTAIN'S voice, now slips out

WILLEMSE. Have you got everything there or shall I . .

DOCTOR (*nervously trying to open the cupboard*) No, no, here . . Hell, the damned thing won't (*He gives a hard tug, the door springs open*) Yes! Here the box emergency bandages.

WILLEMSE Splints! Take a couple of those splints! God knows, there are broken legs

DOCTOR Yes, yes

Then CAPTAIN KUIPER enters, staying in the doorway, a fair-haired hothead, about thirty years of age, with the outward composure of authority He is wearing his best uniform, which is nevertheless rather shabby

KUIPER Doctor! . . Oh, there you are Go below, will you? There are wounded. Who's this?

DOCTOR. Excuse me, Dr Willemse of the *Amsterdam*, who just happened . . .

KUIPER (*nods, but does not shake hands*). All right, kind of you to give a hand Take it easy, it looks worse than it is (*Exit*)

WILLEMSE That's not your Captain?

DOCTOR: That's him

WILLEMSE. God, man, he's only a kid! You're not afraid of a boy, are you?

DOCTOR. That's what I thought, when I first came aboard But . .

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER (*off stage, whistle*) Let go there! Stretcher coming in a minute!

DOCTOR Hurry! Have we got everything?

WILLEMSE Enough for a regiment

DOCTOR Come

They exit. The stage is empty for a moment, then HENKY puts his head in and asks "Captain?" He opens the door for a tiny old gentleman carrying a cane and an attaché case, wearing his panama as if it were a bowler hat.

HENKY The Captain isn't here, sir, but if you don't mind waiting just for a second, I'll go and fetch him

CONSUL Thank you (*Steps over the high threshold like an old stork*)

HENKY Who shall I say is here, sir?

CONSUL The Consul

HENKY Our Consul, sir?

CONSUL Certainly

HENKY Oh Very good, sir I'll just Just one moment
First I'll fix (*He begins to clear the things off the table and to put them into the settee in a great hurry. After the first armful*) Aren't aren't those people allowed to go ashore, sir?

CONSUL What are you aboard this ship, the mate?

HENKY No, sir (*After a second armful*) But that's just terrible, sir Those poor blighters that haven't done a . . .

CONSUL Thank you, that's enough Call the Captain, quickly

HENKY Yes, sir, at once, sir (*After a third armful.*) There . . there aren't many people dead?

CONSUL How much longer am I to wait?

HENKY Going, sir (*Exit*)

The CONSUL is left alone, whilst HENKY's call "Captain, Captain!" trails off. He puts his attaché case on a chair, looks critically at the muddle, checks his gold watch against the clock with a frown, stands twiddling his cane. Then KUIPER enters, the CONSUL holds out his hand.

CONSUL: Are you the Captain?

KUIPER. Yes.

CONSUL. I'm the Consul here. I saw the thing happen from our office window, and I thought . . .

KUIPER: Very kind of you. Drink?

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

CONSUL Thank you (*Sits*) An unpleasant business, Captain

KUIPER (*pouring out the drink*) Yes

CONSUL Jews, eh? How many?

KUIPER One hundred and forty-six

CONSUL H'm I don't understand, to tell you the truth, how they managed to get ashore at all Weren't you informed that they wouldn't be allowed to enter?

KUIPER No

CONSUL No telegram? No hint from the pilot?

KUIPER Nothing

CONSUL (*takes drink*) Thank you What was the cause of this panic?

KUIPER They were held up at the customs, then soldiers came along and ordered them back aboard ship

CONSUL But why, then, all this excitement? Not simply at the sight of those soldiers, surely?

KUIPER Those men have memories of soldiers

CONSUL (*drinks*) What company do you sail for?

KUIPER Myself

CONSUL You own this ship?

KUIPER Yes

CONSUL Ah . . . That's going to be unpleasant

KUIPER For whom? For me?

CONSUL Indeed It's going to cost you money, unless you transported these people under security

KUIPER Security?

CONSUL You didn't arrange for security for the return voyage when you accepted the passage?

KUIPER No

CONSUL But, Captain!

KUIPER Should I have done so?

CONSUL Of course You knew beforehand that you ran a great risk of being refused entry here in South America

KUIPER I did not, sir All these people had their visas and their papers

CONSUL . Yes, Captain, but visas in these chaotic times are of very doubtful value

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER So it seems What now? Can anything be done about this expulsion?

CONSUL I am sorry, but it would be no use even to try

KUIPER That's not so good

CONSUL But why for heaven's sake did you start with it at all? You seem to me to be a decent sailor who wouldn't let himself get mixed up with this sort of slave-trade

KUIPER Decent sailor? How do you mean?

CONSUL No bona-fide ship owner would have undertaken a business like this To drag men, crazy with fear, overseas at exorbitant prices and with accommodation that doesn't meet even the most primitive needs

KUIPER I don't think we understand each other, Consul! For five years I have carried on a decent trade with this ship and so did my father for thirty years before me When I got the offer of one hundred and forty-six passengers for South America, I didn't ask if they were Christians or heathens I fitted up the forward hold for the men, the aft hold for the women and children and turned the messroom into a sick bay You go down, look at the accommodation yourself and then tell me your honest opinion, and——

CONSUL All right, all right, I was only saying

KUIPER And as for the exorbitant prices . I brought them over for ninety-four dollars a head The Royal Dutch wouldn't have done it for that

CONSUL The Royal Dutch wouldn't have let themselves in for it, Captain

KUIPER That's the Royal Dutch's business! I want—— (*Knock on the door*) Yes!

The RABBI and TWO JEWS enter, confused and frightened, their clothing quite unsuited to the climate They look as if they have just been picked up by a police car in some European capital and have come to plead that they have had nothing at all to do with the shooting.

RABBI Captain, we must speak to you.

KUIPER: Not now, Rabbi, you see that I am busy.

FIRST JEW But our people are desperate, Captain. They have delegated us to ask you——

KUIPER Not now, gentlemen. Come back in half an hour.

SECOND JEW But, Captain, what are we to say to them? We must say something. The situation——

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER I'll know more in half an hour Not before (*Closes the door To the* CONSUL). There you are

CONSUL We won't waste any more words on the personal side of the business, Captain Every one must look after his own conscience Have you been ordered to sail already ?

KUIPER Not yet, no

CONSUL The military themselves must be a bit taken aback by the results of their action, so I'll try to take advantage of that to get some respite for you, but it won't be more than twenty-four hours in any case

KUIPER And then ?

CONSUL Then you'll have to sail off with your passengers at your own cost

KUIPER All right

CONSUL What do you mean to do ?

KUIPER Sail to another port where they will be taken in, of course

CONSUL But, my dear Captain, you can't mean . No, you're not serious

KUIPER Why not ?

CONSUL You can't pretend you don't know that this country was the last one on the American continent to accept refugees ?

KUIPER Do you mean to say that I can't get rid of them anywhere ?

CONSUL Nowhere

KUIPER But Brazil, then ? And the Argentine ? And and Chile, if you like ?

CONSUL Not a chance

KUIPER But I can't sail all the way to the Galapagos Islands just to put these people ashore!

CONSUL You wouldn't be able to put them ashore, Captain, not even on the Galapagos Islands

KUIPER But where then ?

CONSUL Nowhere There's only one solution take them back

KUIPER Back ?

CONSUL Back to the country where they come from. They would have to let them in, whether they like it or not

KUIPER And you dare to suggest that, you who had the heart to talk about decency a moment ago ?

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

CONSUL Captain, we were to leave out the personal side of the matter I suggest nothing I can suggest nothing I only give you advice, the best I can, and there is no other advice to give but to take them back And you can't even call it advice, it is the only

KUIPER Stop it! Until now I've kept calm, sir, in spite of your insults

CONSUL And you maintained that it is a matter of indifference to you whether these men are Christians or heathens ?

KUIPER These men are men, that's enough for me

CONSUL I am afraid I don't quite follow your reasoning

KUIPER I don't reason, sir! I've got a heart that feels, and a conscience that must answer to God, and a soul that is immortal! And so have they, even if their faith is not the true one, and so have you, even if you don't trouble yourself about it

CONSUL Captain, the facts! First of all

KUIPER The facts are, sir, that for ten of my thirty years I lived without God or His Commandments, that I drank and lied and went with women, that I was such a swine that my father cursed me, until God Himself gripped me by the scruff of the neck and flung me on my knees

CONSUL That has nothing to do with this matter, Captain

KUIPER It has, everything, sir! For five years now, by the Grace of God, I have lived in peace with my conscience, and the laws of the world, growing in the Faith like a tree. What good would those five years have been if I let myself be felled by the first gale He blows at me to try my roots! I'll bend, sir, if God wills it, I'll have the branches ripped off my body if God wills it, I'll let myself be split and splintered if God wills it, but I will not take these people back

CONSUL . And suppose God should will just that, Captain ?

KUIPER He will not, sir That's why He had the Bible written.

CONSUL Then, apparently, I don't know your God, Captain

KUIPER But He knows you, and He knows me and He knows the poor devils who are lying in my holds now

CONSUL I shouldn't like to believe in a God, Captain, who wanted to force me to an act of madness

KUIPER . One doesn't like to believe, sir, one must.

CONSUL But but, what do you want then ?

KUIPER : I want to put these men ashore in a civilised country.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

CONSUL That you can't do

KUIPER I'll get them ashore, sir, even if I——

CONSUL Even if you ?

KUIPER Even if I should have to black out my lights

CONSUL (*stands up, after a short silence*) Captain, I should like you to take good note that I, as an official representative, advised you to take these people back to their country without delay. Anything you undertake contrary to this advice will be without the backing of your government. Good-bye (*At the door*). As man to man, Captain, why won't you take these people back? Why not?

KUIPER Because I can't

CONSUL You can't because you are full of false notions. You don't really believe that these men, as the sensational papers write, will be slaughtered on the spot the moment they set foot in their home country?

KUIPER. What the papers write, I don't know, sir. I only know what I have seen and heard.

CONSUL And what have you seen and heard? Now?

KUIPER I saw, eight weeks ago, one hundred and forty-six men come aboard my ship. Jews, driven away, that was all I knew. I had never gone in for politics, never wanted to, but I saw, over my own gangway, one hundred and forty-six times God's son come aboard my ship, flogged, beggared, cast out, with the crown of thorns on his head and the cross on his back. Men, like you and me, struck them, kicked them, flung them down—children, like the two of my own, who at Christmas sing "Silent night, holy night" with tiny voices so high that the tears come pouring down your face, now sang "Perish Judah!" And then the eyes of those Jews, sir. A man who has looked in those eyes once, knows more than after reading the papers for five years. And then, as we sailed, as the Doctor dealt with the miscarriages below, as the pilot on the bridge said to me "Nice weather, eh?", then I knew—never. Never, till judgment day, will Christendom be able to wash this crime off its hands. The Jews crucified Jesus once, but the Christians? Seven hundred thousand times over. And now you come, and ask me to deny the gospel of my Saviour and to deliver these hundred and forty-six into the hands of their murderers? No, Consul. The cock will not crow for me!

CONSUL: Captain, listen. Just listen for one moment to a man, who isn't of the youngest any more and who can judge the consequences of your attitude, noble as it may be, because he is more at home in this sort of thing than you are. Suppose you were able to smuggle those men ashore somewhere. What then? Do you think that would

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

make things any better for them? No, Captain, on the contrary By doing that you would simply be handing them over to the military of the country concerned, who would arrest them and send them back without delay

KUIPER They wouldn't be interned after being arrested?

CONSUL No question of it They would be sent back straight away

KUIPER But all those countries have got a Christian government, haven't they?

CONSUL The governments have been forced to take harsh measures

KUIPER But public opinion? What do the people of these countries say?

CONSUL The only people who might be interested in your unhappy cargo, Captain, and the only country in this hemisphere where public opinion might prove stronger than the law, is the United States But, unfortunately

KUIPER Then I'll bring them to the United States

CONSUL But, my dear man, that is madness! First of all their coastal guard is impossible to get through

KUIPER Nonsense There must be some stretch of barren coast that's not patrolled

CONSUL All right Then you'll land them in Alaska or heaven knows what other kind of desert. They would wander about there for a couple of days, or even weeks, in the greatest misery, only to be picked up at last and sent back without mercy

KUIPER But you just said that the only country where public opinion——

CONSUL. No, Captain. As soon as public opinion was aware that your refugees had got ashore, they would have a chance But in an uninhabited region like that, nobody would know, except the seagulls. Now . . . to smuggle one hundred and forty-six people ashore in the full light of public opinion . . . do you see now that what you want is madness?

KUIPER. I see it all right, sir, but I'm afraid it's going to make no difference.

CONSUL: But, my dear man! You can't disregard your reason.

KUIPER. It's not a question of reason, sir, but of Faith. If God has taken the trouble to make known His will, we must believe that He'll provide the means of obeying it. Otherwise the Bible is a mockery.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

CONSUL Then then I have nothing further to say Good luck

Exit

As the CONSUL leaves the cabin, he almost collides with "CHIEF" DAVELAAR, who has obviously been listening at the door The CONSUL disappears after a murmured "I'm sorry!" DAVELAAR enters and closes the door He is an old, bony man, wearing a grease-smeared overall, and very short-sighted

KUIPER Well?

DAVELAAR I want a word with you, youngster

KUIPER Been eavesdropping again?

DAVELAAR Yes! And don't you dare say a word about it For thirty years I sailed with your father, I knew him as if he had been my own brother, and let me tell you this if he were still alive now, he would put you over his knee and spank you till you screamed That's not religion, what you have been talking to that man, that's boy's rubbish

KUIPER I thank you

DAVELAAR. No, kid, you can't get rid of me so easily You may be the Captain now hundred times over and make everybody believe you are a stinking bully, but it's no use pulling that line on me So get that holy smirk off your face or I'll wipe it off. I taught you splicing and knotting when you were still lashed on to the jerry, and so let me tell you one thing——

KUIPER (*who has been totting up on a piece of paper*) How many tons of coal have we left?

DAVELAAR Sixty Ten days But let me have my say I'm the only man left on the ship who knew your father as well as I know you He was a religious man, but he put the interest of the ship before everything else, before his soul and his salvation he put it, and however pious he might be, if our Lord Himself as much as pointed at *The Young Nelly* with one finger, he would have bitten it off And so I tell you one thing——

KUIPER Then we take on five hundred tons to-day.

DAVELAAR Five hundred? Impossible. We'll be lying over the mark.

KUIPER. We've got all the tanks filled up, so just pump out till we have risen high enough

DAVELAAR All right, all right! But now listen For all I care you may be as religious as—as the devil But the moment you put the ship in danger, you'll have to reckon with me. Do you hear that?

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

Then I won't rest until I've knocked you flat, my friend Your money you can gamble away for those Jews, as far as I am concerned, and your eternal soul and your feeling heart into the bargain, but hands off *The Young Nelly* Your father——

KUIPER And now that's enough! You know as much about my father as you know about the ten commandments, and that's mighty little But for all your big talk, you're an old man, so I'll let you read what my father wrote in the Bible he gave me when I took over this ship Then you'll know better

DAVELAAR Wrote? Don't make me laugh He couldn't even write First he broke three pens and then he wrote "faithful" with one "l"

KUIPER (*who has taken a Bible out of the bunk and opened it*) Here Read this

DAVELAAR I can't I haven't got my glasses with me

KUIPER (*reads aloud*) "For my son Joris, as he'll be skipper next to God of *The Young Nelly* Let nobody pull your leg, child, in this book you'll find your true course When I'll be up yonder, I'll go on keeping guard over you If you get the devil aboard, hoist the flag of the cross, that you'll find in the drawer with the papers, and I'll be standing by your side Never despair, even if you are black with sin, for one thing I know now Our God is a God of mercy Father"

DAVELAAR Does he write God with "d"?

KUIPER You *are* an old stinker, get out!

DAVELAAR And you are a good skipper Stick to that! Better a good skipper than a rotten missionary That flag of the cross . . . hal Laugh meself sick, I could If you knew

Knock on the door

KUIPER Yes!

HENKY Captain Someone to see you.

KUIPER Who is it?

HENKY I don't know, Captain I believe it's an Admiral.

Behind HENKY, short, sturdy CAPTAIN BRUINSMA has appeared, in dazzling white with his gold captain's stripes, sun-burned, phlegmatic, composed, he carries his sixty years with boyish carelessness.

BRUINSMA. Am I interrupting? Bruinsma Captain of the *Amsterdam* Just heard from my doctor what's happened here, and I've come to see if there's anything I can do for you.

KUIPER Kind of you, Captain. Come in. (*To DAVELAAR.*) Get ready for bunkering, you. Hurry up.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

DAVELAAR Ay, ay, Captain, your orders (*Exit*)

BRUINSMA • I hope you won't take it as unhealthy curiosity, Captain
If I'm not needed, just say so Same good friends

KUIPER I don't think there's much you can do, Captain I have
to be out of this harbour within twenty-four hours, with all souls

BRUINSMA Yes, yes No greater pest than these refugees No need
to tell me Only three weeks ago, a shipful of these poor blighters was
lying off Alexandria The same old story Offered themselves for sale,
one dollar a head for lifelong service, only to get ashore But buyers ?
They would sooner buy a leper You're going to take them back, I
reckon

KUIPER No

BRUINSMA H'm Smuggle them ashore ?

KUIPER • If I can

BRUINSMA Where ?

KUIPER Don't know I thought about Long Island

BRUINSMA Long Island ? You're crazy Why not New York
straight away ? Brazil, man, somewhere in the pampas Nobody'll
notice and you'll be rid of the mess

KUIPER No I want to set these people free, not leave the murder
to someone else

BRUINSMA I see You are an idealist.

KUIPER You mean a fool

BRUINSMA Don't know yet You own this ship, don't you ?

KUIPER Yes

BRUINSMA Mortgaged ?

KUIPER . Yes

BRUINSMA So you want to idealise on another's account ? Then
you are certainly no fool, but probably a Christian H'm ?

KUIPER • I thank you for your interest, but as you see . .

BRUINSMA Yes, Captain, such is life A naked girl is nice, but the
truth is prettier with clothes on But no fear, I am going (*Goes to
the door, sees the photo*) Nice pair of kids! Yours ?

KUIPER • Yes.

BRUINSMA • The wife is something of a good-looker too. If I were
you, my friend, I should have a good look at that picture before sailing
off to Long Island. Jesus had no children, and that makes a big difference.

KUIPER : How do you know ?

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

BRUINSMA What? That Jesus had no children?

KUIPER Why I don't take these people back

BRUINSMA Knowledge of men You've got the head of a choleric and behave like a phlegmatic Such a sin against nature can only be pulled off by Christianity Look The only thing that gives away your temper is the colour of your eyes They are blue and then turn green, as they're doing now

KUIPER Thank you (*Opening the door*)

BRUINSMA It's for me to thank you, young man Madmen like you give an old sinner hope again Two months from now I'll be lying round north in the neighbourhood of your Long Island I'll try to spot you, perhaps I can be of some help then

KUIPER I hope to be finished with it by then

BRUINSMA Make no mistake, you'll be just beginning If two months from now you're still a Christian, then I, a confirmed unbeliever, would be ready to take that as proof of the existence of God

KUIPER You gave that proof yourself a moment ago

BRUINSMA I?

KUIPER Your story about the Jews, lying off Alexandria, who tried to sell themselves for a dollar a head, but they would sooner buy a leper

BRUINSMA What has that got to do with the existence of God?

KUIPER (*looking it up in the Bible that still lies open before him*) Deuteronomy 28, I think it's verse 68 . . . Yes, here it is. What God will do to the Jews if they don't remain true to their vow "And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again, with ships, and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, but no man shall buy you" A promise made five thousand years back, fulfilled three weeks ago

BRUINSMA *stands a moment taken aback, then takes his glasses out of his breast pocket and reads the text over again After there has been a knock at the door twice without either of them noticing it, the door is opened hesitatingly and KUIPER explodes*

KUIPER: Now what's this? I told you I didn't want to be dis—
It is the RABBI, small and helpless, hat in hand.

RABBI: The half hour is over . . . Am I too early still . . .?

KUIPER: It is too early in any case to say anything positive, Rabbi. The Consul has not informed me yet of the final decision of the authorities.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

RABBI But my people, Captain What am I to tell my people ?
Three have tried already to take their lives Is there then no possibility,
however small, that we might be accepted ?

KUIPER No

RABBI Ach!

KUIPER But you may tell your people, in my name, that I will do
whatever is in my power to give them back their freedom

RABBI You you won't take us back ?

KUIPER No I'll sail And God help me

RABBI Captain! (*Grasps his hand*) Thank you! Thank you!
Thank you! All the children of Israel

KUIPER Come, Rabbi Our God is the same

As he goes out with BRUINSMA, *the curtain falls*

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

Act Two

The Captain's cabin of The Young Nelly, off the American coast, near Sandy Hook, six weeks after the first act

As the curtain rises, the stage is almost in darkness, the door and the port-holes being blacked out. It is raining, the steady soft rustle continually whispers in the background. The engine is thudding far away below, sometimes the swish of a wave is heard, sometimes a bird swerves screaming over the ship. Far away the man at the sounding lead sings out the depth. "Five small Five Five big" His melancholy drawl continues at regular intervals throughout the whole of the first scene and adds to the eerie atmosphere, intensified further by the spooky shadows a small oil lamp throws on the back wall. It is the only point of light in the cabin and stands on the table on a chart, round which KUIPER and the THREE JEWS are grouped. KUIPER is in oilskins, the others in their eternal refugees' dress, but wearing white lifebelts which make them look like white torsos moving in mid-air. KUIPER gives instructions, pointing out spots on the map with a pair of compasses.

KUIPER So you understand? Here we'll put you ashore, the star-board boat first, carrying the men under the command of Mate Meyer, then the port boat with the women under Mr. Fruithof, then the dinghy with the sick under the command of the bo'sun.

FIRST JEW. So it's the same as the other times.

KUIPER. So far, yes. But as soon as you are ashore, it's going to be quite different from the other times. This time you are, at daybreak, to guide the whole lot to this spot. This is a seaside resort, at present crowded with people. Once you manage to reach it, and to alarm the whole village so that everybody runs out of his house, you are safe. But in order to get there you must not follow the beach, like this, because there ~~you~~ would run a great risk of being picked up by the military,

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

but just head straight west across country until you get to this factory here, that you'll recognise easily by its two high chimneys There you go to the left, follow the highway, not on it but beside it (*A knock on the door, he covers the lamp with his cap*) Yes!

It is the DOCTOR followed by HENKY with a bag Both are in oilskins, glistening with rain

DOCTOR Excuse me, Captain, I'll have to get to the cupboard just once more

KUIPER Go ahead Are the sick in the dinghy?

DOCTOR Yes, Captain Come on, Henky! (*Closes the door*)

KUIPER (*uncovering the lamp*) So it's clear?

FIRST JEW Wait till daybreak, then head west till we come to the factory, then to the left along by the highway till we get to the village

SECOND JEW Oh, my! If only we got there already!

KUIPER Come on, no use losing heart It's a perfect night Black with rain The chances of their catching us this time are one in a thousand. But everything, gentlemen, depends on your raising hell in that village the moment you get there Shout, smash window panes, do whatever you like, as long as it serves to——

The door is opened after a short knock so that KUIPER scarcely has time to cover the lamp It is MEYER, in oilskins and a sou'wester, dripping with rain and in a great hurry

MEYER Four fathom at the lead, Captain It is high time

KUIPER Are the boats swung out?

MEYER Everything loaded, and ready for lowering.

KUIPER All right Stop the engine, keep the lead going

MEYER Aye, aye, Captain (*Exit*)

KUIPER: Now, gentlemen, here we go (*Gives the Rabbi a small box*) Rabbi. your papers (*Shakes hands with all three of them*) Let's say: third time lucky (*To HENKY.*) Cover the lamp

HENKY Ay, Captain. (*Obeys*)

As soon as it is dark, KUIPER and the THREE JEWS leave the cabin

DOCTOR (*as the door closes*) Yes! Let's have the light again . Come on, kid, get going, no time to waste . Here, take that! Be careful with those bottles, damn you

The engine-room bell rings out below, the engine stops thudding

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

HENKY Oh, lumme oh lumme, doctor

DOCTOR What, broken something?

HENKY No. I'm so scared

DOCTOR You're crazy You haven't got to go ashore, have you?

HENKY But I have to go in that boat, and suppose they start shooting like they did the other nights

KUIPER (*off stage, after a whistle*) Let go, starboard! Stand by, port!

HENKY Oh, lumme, oh lumme, there they go

DOCTOR Keep your trap shut! Shut that bag and get going! (*At the door*) Now, are you coming?

As HENKY puts out the lamp, KUIPER's voice rings out again after a sharp whistle

KUIPER (*off stage*) Let go, port! Stand by, dinghy!

DOCTOR (*in complete darkness*) Henky!

HENKY Here I am, doc, here I am

As HENKY stands in the doorway, a siren shrieks outside, and a dazzling white light flashes on to the ship, while a gun shot cracks out like a clap of thunder

Mamma!! (*Falls on his knees behind the door and starts praying at once*)

Immediately after the shot, a wailing of many voices arises off stage, drowned by the ferocious hooting of The Young Nelly's steam whistle, which gives three blasts. The engine-room bell rings, the engine starts thudding full speed astern

KUIPER (*off stage, after a whistle*) Easy, there, easy Don't be afraid! Easy! (*Whistle*) Number one! Up with your boat! Mind their hands! (*Whistle*.) Bo'sun! Rope ladder to starboard!

Commands ring out, nailed boots stamp on the deck, in the background the boat behind the door is hauled in, and miserable silhouettes stagger out of it. But during all this, with a terrified, piercing little voice, HENKY has been praying.

HENKY (*starting at the shot*) Oh Lord, oh Lord, don't let me die, oh Lord, let them stop shooting, oh Lordy, oh Lordy, I beseech you, don't let me die, I'll never do it again, never, never, never, I'll give back everything, everything, I swear, the mate's knife, the cook's cigarette holder, the doctor's silver pencil, everything, everything, oh

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

Lord, but make them stop, make them stop shooting! Oh Lordy, oh beautiful Lordy, which art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, and the mate's cuff-links, and Mr Fruithof's hair lotion, that gave me away by its damned stink, I know, oh Lord, that was a sign that I had to keep my paws off it, but I have kept on sinning, yes, I know, beautiful Lord, sinned I have, sinned like me uncle Joe, but it was the devil! I swear you, good dear Lordy mine, it was the devil, the devil did it, each time I didn't want to he made me do it, each time I wanted to be converted, but each time he put his dirty finger in the way, it's his fault, oh Lord, and therefore give me just one more tiny little chance, don't let it be too late, forgive me, forgive me, I'll never say again that I'm twenty years old, I'll never run after the girls again and try to get at their ear-rings and so let me get up now, Lord, I'll never do it again, so let me stop now, I promise, I promise, I'll do everything I don't like, but let me stop praying, come on Lord, come on, let me say amen, I beg you, let me stop this, please, please, I must take a breath and and blow my nose and amen! Oh, God, I can't, hey! Amen, hey! I feel so queer, I'm paralysed, I can't get up, I . . . amen, amen! Help, Jesus! Don't make me crazy, for Christ's sake, I . . . help, I've got the praying cramp!

At that moment, the searchlight is put out and the stage becomes completely dark

Off stage MEYER shouts "Paarlberg! Number three! Paarlberg!"

Oh Jesus, oh mother, think of my mother, mamma, mamma, it'll strike her dead if she hears that I've gone crazy from praying She'll

MEYER switches on the light

Help! Don't shoot!

MEYER Hey, what's the big idea? (*Shakes him*) Hey, what's the matter with you?

HENKY I can't . . . I can't . . . amen, amen Oh beautiful God, I don't know what to do, I've gone all to pieces, to pieces at your holy feet . . .

DOCTOR (*hurrying up*) Meyer, the Captain's shouting for you all over the ship! Those Yankees . . .

HENKY . So trample on me, just trample on me, I can't go on!

DOCTOR . What's going on here?

MEYER : Don't ask me. Just one bloody, blazing asylum! The whole damned tub!

KUIPER (*off stage, after a whistle*) Meyer! Number one!

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

MEYER Yes, yes roaring mad! (*Exit*)

HENKY (*in the meantime*) To pieces, to pieces, oh Lord, trample on me A rag, I am, sinned to death, I have, now I'm done for, now I want to be dead Amen, amen, so kick me down to hell, yes, now fling me to the devil, amen, to the devil, the devil, I'll make him pay, I'll show him what he'll get for tempting children that want to go to Jesus Yes! I'll go for his throat, I will, I'll scratch his eyes out of his head, I will, I'll break his crooked legs, ram his horns into his paunch, tear his tail off his bloody !

DOCTOR *gives him two businesslike boxes on the ear*

Oh. oh AMEN! (*And bursts into tears*)

DOCTOR Get hold of that bag and come along

HENKY (*whimpering*) No, no

DOCTOR Come on, get going

HENKY No, not in the hold Please, doctor, not in the hold

DOCTOR What's the matter with the hold?

HENKY You beat them You beat them Jews!

DOCTOR What? Who beats the Jews?

HENKY You! All of you! Mate Meyer and Mr Fruithof and Mr Paarlberg and the bo'sun, everyone!

DOCTOR You're crazy

HENKY Three times we've been thrown back now! Now comes the cook!

DOCTOR The cook?

HENKY The cook said so!

DOCTOR What did the cook say?

HENKY The cook said: As we sailed, he said, my heart was just jelly, he said, so sorry I was for those poor Jews, but now, he said, now I'll agree with anyone who says they are to be slaughtered, for they crucified Jesus, he said, and they find fault with my grub on top of it, and therefore I'll chop all their heads off, he said, if we are thrown back once more .

MEYER *hurries in, followed by DAVELAAR, whose overall is soaked with rain* MEYER *goes to the table where he nervously rolls up the chart before trying to hide it in the bunk.*

DAVELAAR (*as he comes in*) And what kind of a ship is it? Same destroyer as last time?

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

MEYER Ask me A gun with a boat under it Now leave me alone

DAVELAAR Let me tell you, it was a narrow escape this time God help me, I felt the whole arm and leg shop shudder at the blow Are those Yankees aboard ship already ?

MEYER What are you pestering me for, can't you see for yourself ? What else did they put their sun-lamp out for ?

DOCTOR What are you doing with the chart ?

MEYER Trying to hide it It's scrawled all over with marks for our landing-places Have to get rid of it before those Yankees get here, poking their big noses into it

DOCTOR Give it to me (*Takes the chart out of his hands*)

DAVELAAR How many are there anyway ?

MEYER Six and a civilian into the bargain

To DOCTOR, who has opened the settee

Hell, doc, what are you doing ?

DOCTOR Putting it into my chest

DAVELAAR Civilian, what do you mean ?

MEYER But you're crumpling it all up We shan't be able to use it any more

DOCTOR And what a pity !

DAVELAAR (*tugging at MEYER's sleeve*) Now speak up, what civilian ?

MEYER Oh, damn you ! Whiskers and a bowler hat, and go to hell !

DOCTOR (*to HENKY, who is listening with all his ears*) Here, take that bag to the messroom Quick !

HENKY Yes, doc (*And slinks away*)

DAVELAAR . I wish they'd take us into harbour this time.

MEYER . And what else do you want, roses ?

DOCTOR : Give me a straight answer. Have you been beating those Jews ?

MEYER (*after a short silence*) . If they had meant to take us into harbour, they would have brought a pilot

DAVELAAR And what about the civilian ? Can't he be a pilot ?

DOCTOR : So you admit it

MEYER . What do we admit ? Do you think that we have nothing better to do ? (*To DAVELAAR*) If they had intended to take us in——

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER *enters, followed by an AMERICAN and a DUTCH NAVAL OFFICER*
The American breezy and good natured, the Dutchman wooden and
unmoved, both are Lieutenant-Commanders, in full dress, soaked
with rain, and both carry briefcases

AMERICAN OFFICER (*on entering*) Hiya, gentlemen ² Everything okay since last time ²

DAVELAAR Could have been better, thanks

AMERICAN Yeah, boys, it's your own damn choice I'm doing my duty, and the only part of it I like is your gin God! what weather!

KUIPER Meyer

MEYER Ay, Captain (*Goes to the cupboard and pours out a drink*)
You want one too, sir ²

DUTCH OFFICER No, thank you

DAVELAAR Are we going to be taken in, this time ²

AMERICAN That's what you'd like to know, eh ² Damn! Look at that briefcase Gimme a dot of your cotton, will you ²

DAVELAAR (*does so*) You gave us quite a start, this time, young man I almost jumped into my engine

AMERICAN Was it a near miss ²

DAVELAAR Was it ² All my pots and pans came down over my head

AMERICAN Good Our chief gunner will be pleased to hear that (*Takes the drink.*) Thanks, uncle Nobody else having one ²

DAVELAAR We're rationed to keep you going

AMERICAN Then better have one, for this is going to be our last date Here goes! (*Drinks*)

DUTCHMAN Now, can we get to business, Captain ²

KUIPER All right But tell me first what I'm supposed to do. Sail or stay put ² I've got to make my arrangements, you see.

DUTCHMAN I think the orders are that we're to stay aboard and wait for daylight (*To American*) Aren't we ²

AMERICAN (*finishing his drink*) Yes . . . (*Putting down his glass.*) Ah! shall I miss you! . . . You can drop anchor, Captain Easy ground around here, so don't worry

KUIPER Then let go the starboard one, Meyer; you, Chief, cover your fires and keep one man in the hole—and you go below, doctor.

DOCTOR: Yes, Captain.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

DAVELAAR But, look here

MEYER Come on

THEY *leave*

AMERICAN Now, Captain (To DUTCHMAN) You don't mind me having a word with him first?

DUTCHMAN At your service

AMERICAN Listen, you damned bullheaded Dutchman . . . (To DUTCH OFFICER) Sorry

DUTCHMAN That's quite all right

AMERICAN Let me put you a question first are you still hoping to put it over us?

KUIPER What about taking us into harbour this time?

AMERICAN If you're waiting for that, you had better send for a rocking chair straight away And damn well you know it

KUIPER I had hoped to get these people ashore without having to torture them a fourth time.

AMERICAN My dear man, we've gone through all this before, so no need to tell you again what the attitude of the United States authorities is towards you and your unlucky bunch of Hebe's. You know we all sympathise with you a lot, and that's the main reason why we've let you get away with it three times now, without taking our gloves off. But whether we do or do not sympathise with you and your cargo, or whether we take off our caps to you as one hell of a sailor or not, that has nothing to do with our duty. Understand? So if we tell you something this time that you won't like at all, don't blame me and the Navy. He's all yours, sir

DUTCHMAN (*opening his briefcase*) Captain, I am here as an official representative of the Naval Attache to Her Majesty's Ambassador at Washington, and it is my duty to warn you that anything you say in my presence may be used in evidence against you

KUIPER: Thank you

DUTCHMAN. The United States naval authorities have informed our Naval Attache of your actions and asked him to put an end to your endeavours. This, it is my duty to inform you, is not within our power, but—

AMERICAN: Now look here, old man—

DUTCHMAN. But you must have noticed, Captain, that the stopping shot the United States Coastal Guard has had to drop in front of you three times now, dropped nearer to your bows every time

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER The water splashed right on to the bridge tonight, at least Perhaps next time they could

DUTCHMAN Next time, Captain, the shot won't be dropped just short of your ship, but right in to it That's the message the United States Naval authorities gave the Naval Attache to Her Majesty's Ambassador at Washington, and it is my duty in being here to neutralise the consequences to the Royal Netherlands Government of an eventual sinking of your vessel

KUIPER Trying to be funny ?

DUTCHMAN I think you may be sure, Captain, that the Coastal Guard will carry out its orders without hesitating for one second (*To AMERICAN*) Am I correct ?

AMERICAN You bet your life I've told you already, my friend, that our personal feelings don't count Now we've got definite orders, we'll sink you without turning a hair Got that ?

KUIPER All right Go ahead

DUTCHMAN How do you mean ?

KUIPER (*to DUTCHMAN*) Tell the United States Coastal Guard, sir, in my name, that they couldn't do me a greater favour (*To AMERICAN*) Go back to your destroyer, now, tell your commander that tomorrow I'll make a fresh try to put those people ashore and ask him to shoot But ask him to do me the favour of hitting me aft, for then he'll do the least damage and she'll sink in the nicest way

AMERICAN Didn't I tell you ? He's nuts

DUTCHMAN Is that your last word ?

KUIPER Oh, cut it out! What do you think I am ? I've got two holds full of people on the point of going crazy. Do you think I want to waste my time with this sort of nonsense ?

DUTCHMAN Nonsense ?

AMERICAN The very existence of your ship is at stake!

KUIPER Nonsense! You'll know better than to sink me, for what would be the consequence for you ? You would have to lower your boats, pick up my Jews, bring them ashore, and then the laugh would be on you. For then they would go straight from here to the internment camp.

DUTCHMAN: You are mistaken there, Captain. Even if your refugees succeeded in setting foot on United States territory, they would be sent back to their country.

KUIPER No, sir.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

DUTCHMAN I beg your pardon ?

KUIPER No, sir! They would, as long as they could keep public opinion out of it But they can't any longer! Every holiday maker from Cape Hatteras to Sandy Hook knows at the minute that a shipful of famished Jews is trying to sneak ashore Every newspaper, from New York to San Francisco, would splash the news all over the front page, the moment the first of my Jews set foot ashore A committee has even been formed to get visas for those people, and I contact it daily by wireless So make your commander shoot, sir, tomorrow Then my Jews will be in safety the day after And so he won't shoot, sir, and so you've come to the wrong address I know too much, sir, and my kind regards to the Ambassador

AMERICAN Well, I'm damned

DUTCHMAN You seem very well informed about American matters, Captain Who gave you all this information ?

KUIPER The Consul in Montevideo

AMERICAN That's a pity

KUIPER For you

AMERICAN For that Consul

KUIPER Why ? Isn't that man allowed to tell me the truth ?

DUTCHMAN A Consul, Captain, is not appointed to serve truth, but the interests of his government

KUIPER And how can my saving these miserable Jews harm the interests of my government ?

DUTCHMAN It's for the government to judge that, Captain, not you You are to obey your authorities, who order you now to stop pestering a friendly power any longer

KUIPER And the Jews ? What does our government want me to do with the Jews ? Take them back to be butchered ?

DUTCHMAN That is your business If you don't want to take them back, then drop anchor outside the three-mile limit and wait for the results of your committee But in case you should go on trying to force these undesirable aliens on the United States, I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to sign the declaration I will then read out to you.

KUIPER . What declaration ?

DUTCHMAN A declaration that you have been made acquainted with the fact that the Royal Netherlands Government declines all further political responsibility for your acts.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

AMERICAN Meaning that it no longer recognises your ship as its territory

DUTCHMAN I don't think that is legally possible, but practically it amounts to almost the same thing. If you refuse to grant our most urgent request, Captain, it will mean that from then on you'll be utterly devoid of any protection whatever in trying to land these people. A very harsh measure, but you still have a choice.

KUIPER So if I sail with my one hundred and forty-six Jews into the open sea, to perish there from hunger and thirst, until I turn into a Flying Dutchman, I'll be a good citizen?

DUTCHMAN If you want to put it that way, by all means.

KUIPER And if I go on battering at this sleeping people for my shipload of dying men, I'll be outlawed?

AMERICAN. Yes!

KUIPER. What would you choose, sir? With God watching you?

AMERICAN There we go, off on the good old Bible again! No, my Christian pirate friend, you won't trick me into a Salvation Army debate this time. This time we've brought you a champion at that game, and better count your front teeth first.

KUIPER What's he talking about?

DUTCHMAN The Naval Attache, Captain, has been informed that you felt yourself inspired by considerations of a Christian nature, and because Her Majesty's Government doesn't want to neglect any chance of clearing up this misunderstanding, it made contact with the pastor of the Dutch community in New York. You are a member of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, aren't you?

KUIPER A clergyman? Not the fellow who was sitting in the boat with you?

AMERICAN Now look at him. Bit of a surprise, eh?

DUTCHMAN. The clergyman is a former Naval chaplain and in spite of his age was ready to make this voyage in order to exchange views with you, at the suggestion of both our Naval Departments. It seems to me that our discussion has reached a point now . . .

KUIPER. I don't want to see that man.

AMERICAN: Then you don't, feel sure of your ground!

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

AMERICAN. Now look here

DUTCHMAN (*has opened the door and calls out*) Would you be kind enough to come in, sir?

Almost immediately the black dripping form of the CLERGYMAN looms in the doorway. A grey-haired man with the deeply-lined face of an old monk. The OFFICERS go out and close the door.

CLERGYMAN (*puts out his hand*) Good evening, brother

KUIPER We are not brothers

CLERGYMAN Are you a Christian?

KUIPER Yes!

CLERGYMAN (*gives him a mighty wallop on the ear. KUIPER's fist shoots out to hit back but the clergyman keeps his arm down with unexpected strength and says*) Sermon on the Mount, St Matthew 5, verse 39 "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." So you are no Christian. You are trying to become one, just like me. Sit down.

The CLERGYMAN sits down and wrings out the ends of his coat. KUIPER stands for a moment taken aback, walks a few steps, comes to a standstill in front of the portrait.

KUIPER (*with his back to the clergyman*) Is it wrong then what I am doing?

CLERGYMAN What are you doing?

KUIPER Saving these Jews

CLERGYMAN By taking them back famished and tortured instead of healthy and strong?

KUIPER I won't take them back!

CLERGYMAN Not today, perhaps, then in a couple of weeks.

KUIPER I'll get these people ashore.

CLERGYMAN: How do you know that? Has God told you so? Have you seen a sign?

KUIPER: No.

CLERGYMAN. Then you won't get them ashore, for I have seen a sign. Scores of destroyers, forty-five knots an hour. Planes shadowing you, day and night. All the money and all the food of the whole world against—you.

KUIPER: Have I been reading the Bible wrongly then all my life?

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

CLERGYMAN Certainly. The Bible is a mysterious book, brother God's word seems to contradict itself almost everywhere I have been a theologian for thirty-five years When I was sitting at Sunday School I thought I could read the Bible I don't think so now

KUIPER . Sir, this is very important for me, it might change everything Answer me, not as a representative of the government, but as a man of God do you think it could be God's will that I should take these people back ?

CLERGYMAN I think it is God's will that you should try to become a Christian You won't by torturing one hundred and forty-six people for the sake of your own salvation If you can't accept the orders of the authorities there is only one way out for you resign Hand over the command to your mate and leave the sea Then you will be making a sacrifice for your faith But in secret, as Christ teaches Not with trumpets on the corner of the street, but in darkness Then you are as good a Christian as the poor fellows who will not take a job on the railway because they don't want to work on the Sabbath

KUIPER But those men only have themselves and their families to consider! I hold the fate of one hundred and forty-six helpless people in my hand!

CLERGYMAN If I could believe, only for one second, that you really would be able to save these people, I would say you were right

KUIPER Why shouldn't I ? If God has taken the trouble of making His will known to me, He'll make it possible for me to fulfil it

CLERGYMAN The only one, my dear boy, who has yet been able to interpret God's will flawlessly is Jesus And I hope you will forgive me if I can't see you as the second Messiah.

KUIPER See me as you see yourself a servant of the Lord

CLERGYMAN St. Matthew 12, verse 19 The servant of the Lord works without noise "He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets"

KUIPER . The same Matthew, I don't know the verse: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light, and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops."

CLERGYMAN Captain, I have told you, it is of no use to enter into a discussion of the exegesis of the scriptures. You are erring. You have overstepped the boundaries of free interpretation of the scripture set for every member of the Church. In the name of the synod of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, I must charge you to cease your endeavours.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER And the Jews? What does the synod say about these Jews? Am I to murder them?

CLERGYMAN. Leave that to God. You have done too much already.

KUIPER And if I should think that I have done too little?

CLERGYMAN If you should go on with your endeavours to smuggle these men ashore, you will be acting against the explicit commands of your Church.

KUIPER Perhaps you, too, have got a declaration for me to sign.

CLERGYMAN Not a declaration, but I have just scribbled down the standpoint of the Church and you would oblige me if you could sign it in order to clear up all misunderstandings with the Ambassador (*He hands KUIPER a piece of paper he has taken from his pocket*).

KUIPER *tears it up without a word*

(*Stands up*). With that you have torn up the principles that have guided our people for three hundred years.

KUIPER And where have they guided them to? Listen!

In the short silence that follows the far-off wailing from the holds, that has been hovering in the background all the time, grows audible

CLERGYMAN The greatest sin a man can commit, brother, is spiritual pride. All real Christians in the whole world are troubling their heads over the Jewish problem. . .

KUIPER: For a real Christian there is no Jewish problem, only a Christian problem.

CLERGYMAN: I'll pray for mercy for you. That is the only thing left I can do for you.

KUIPER. Thank you. The Rabbi and I will pray for you, and for the Reformed Church of the Netherlands.

The CLERGYMAN puts on his soaked hat, like a judge passing sentence of death. As he opens the door to leave, the RABBI is standing behind it in the rain, the box in his hands.

RABBI. Oh . . . excuse me, Captain . . . I didn't want to disturb you . . .

KUIPER You have arrived at exactly the right moment.

The CLERGYMAN disappears into the darkness. The RABBI enters hesitatingly.

RABBI. I only came to give you back the papers, Captain. . . I am afraid the box has got a bit wet . . .

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER (*taking the box*) Yes . The third time wasn't lucky It is a pity

RABBI We are all of us very grateful, Captain, that you were willing to try once more, but now I suppose you will . or is there still some slight hope left ?

KUIPER (*sighs*) I don't know

RABBI Only for the sake of my people, Captain They are beginning to lose all courage now Isn't there a thing I can tell them ? It needn't be true

DOCTOR (*hurrying in without greeting*) Captain, I must speak to you immediately! The Jews——

KUIPER I'm sorry! I am busy with a passenger

DOCTOR But I wanted just because the Rabbi——

KUIPER Thank you!

DOCTOR (*offended*) Oh! I beg your pardon (*Exit*)

KUIPER (*to the frightened Rabbi*) I am at a loss too, Rabbi I should say Just tell them I informed the committee ashore that we have passed exhaustion point and that we are expecting the final telegram any minute

RABBI. Yes . Yes, that's very good, Captain . . Thank you Thank you very much I'll go now

KUIPER One moment, please. (*Opens the door and calls.*) Doctor!

DOCTOR (*appearing in the doorway after a few seconds, coldly*): You want me ?

KUIPER Your message

DOCTOR (*formally*) The crew is mishandling the Jew—the passengers. I thought it to be my duty . . .

KUIPER : Mishandling ? Who is ?

DOCTOR The officers, the bo'sun and the sailors As they were loaded into the boats, there was kicking and beating, and as they were herded back into the holds, belts were used to drive them on.

KUIPER (*to the Rabbi*) Is that true ?

RABBI No, no, Captain Not at all. . . . I mean . . . the Doctor is perfectly right But it is of no importance at all.

DOCTOR (*to KUIPER*): There you are, now you hear for yourself. (*To RABBI.*) How do you think we are to prevent such things, sir, if you all keep your mouths shut about it ? The last two weeks I have

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treated scores of wounds and bruises, which the patients said were from knocking into something, and which now prove to be

KUIPER One moment, doctor! (*To RABBI*) I'll ask you afterwards to clear up all this, Rabbi, you and the two other gentlemen, but now go down, please, and calm your people and put an end to that wailing

RABBI. Yes, Captain Very good, Captain (*Saluting the CAPTAIN and the DOCTOR separately with a bow*) Good afternoon, good afternoon (*And disappears into the night*)

DOCTOR (*as soon as the RABBI has closed the door*) I'm sorry, Captain, but the way you kicked me out like a schoolboy, I can't take that lying down. After all I am the physician aboard this ship

KUIPER Just because you are the physician, I expect you to realise what those people need before everything else self-respect As long as you speak about "Jews" that are "loaded" and "herded back", you are treating men like a vet

DOCTOR You're right I'm sorry Typical symptom of neurasthenia I can't help it, Captain, but by God, it's getting beyond me It's more than I can tackle

KUIPER How did you get hold of that rumour of mishandling?

DOCTOR. No rumour, Captain, the truth. Henky, the kid, blurted it out in a hysterical moment Meyer and the Chief had to admit it. The cook seems to be the ringleader, setting the whole ship against the Jews And the Jews are playing into his hands by their cringing attitude For some time I have felt my own hands itching as I poured bromide into those cry-babies through a funnel I admit it honestly.

KUIPER But these men left South America cheering two months ago . .

DOCTOR: They see no way out of this business any more, Captain They see their hardly-earned money being gambled away for a shipload of wretches who no longer believe in their rescue themselves. And that's another thing, Captain, that I must warn you about seriously. If we are beaten off the coast once more as we were tonight, you can expect an epidemic of suicides below, and then hell'll be let loose.

KUIPER Come, come. (*He pats the DOCTOR on the back*) Those men have endured so much already.

DOCTOR You have got my reports You can read for yourself. You can see for yourself from the bridge Half of those people are camping on deck now because the cramped room below is driving them crazy: claustrophobia is raging like a contagious disease. I am diluting my bromide now one in seventy because otherwise my stock wouldn't last

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a week Cardio-vascular cramps are the order of the day More than thirty patients are complaining of a burning pain in the stomach and declare they have got gastric ulcers from the food—that explains the hostility of the cook, by the way—but not one ulcer is to be found, plain nervous angina One shock more and all those cases will become suicide attempts One is lying below now dying, probably laudanum All of them carry a deadly dose of some poison or other that they refuse to hand over If you don't free these people within a week by some decision, whatever it may be, the ship will turn into a blazing madhouse within a fortnight, from which you and I will flee screaming And if that is to be the result of your practical Christianity

KUIPER All right! I know enough now Go below, see what you can do

DOCTOR There is another thing, Captain

KUIPER No Not now Later

DOCTOR As you like

When the DOCTOR has gone out quietly and closed the door, KUIPER remains alone, an almost beaten man Outside it has become lighter in the meantime, behind the portholes day is breaking, yellow and tearful with rain KUIPER walks, then stops in front of the portrait where he covers his face with his hands

Then DAVELAAR walks in quietly, looks at KUIPER, lights a pipe.

DAVELAAR (after a long pause) Remember what I said ?

KUIPER Oh, leave me alone.

DAVELAAR There's going to be no more sharp shooting at this ship. Get that ?

KUIPER Did you know about this beating of the Jews ?

DAVELAAR I did it

KUIPER : Don't do it again

DAVELAAR : As long as you stop chasing them up and down the boat's ladders, there'll be no need to.

KUIPER . You don't care much about your soul, do you ?

DAVELAAR : Two things I care about . the ship and you. I made you into the sailor you are. I'm not going to let you turn crazy before my eyes. I would rather risk my soul by beating up a couple of Jews. Do you know there's a mutiny coming ?

KUIPER : Ah, get along.

DAVELAAR : Up till now it was the Jews that got it ; but the next is going to be you. This bullying act of yours only works as long as

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

you are sure of yourself, but they'll be at your throat the minute your knees start to tremble And don't try to tell me they are not trembling now

A knock at the door, a second knock DAVELAAR opens the door, it is the NAVAL OFFICERS with their briefcases

DUTCHMAN Captain, we've come for your decision

KUIPER Must that be now, sir ?

DUTCHMAN I'm sorry We can't give you any more time to think it over The sun rises in ten minutes

AMERICAN Furthermore that pastor has told us the outcome of your discussion After that any further waste of words seems useless. So let's get it over and done with Up to you, sir

DUTCHMAN (*arranging his papers*) One moment Have you got your copy ?

KUIPER *beckons to DAVELAAR, who now leaves quietly*

AMERICAN Yeah, I've got it here Fire away.

DUTCHMAN (*to KUIPER*) • By the way if you should feel inclined to tear up this declaration too, please take into consideration that we have four copies I will read it out to you now (*Reading*) "I, Kuiper, Joris, born, etc, etc, skipper of the steam-vessel, etc, booked at, etc., declare myself by signing this act to be in full knowledge of the fact that I, at any further attempts forcibly to unload my cargo, consisting of one hundred and forty-six stateless individuals ." (*To AMERICAN*) Shouldn't that now read . "one hundred and forty-five" ? (*To CAPTAIN*) We have just heard from your ship's doctor that one of them .

AMERICAN Never mind Don't rub it in

DUTCHMAN All right So " . forcibly to unload my cargo, consisting of one hundred and forty-five stateless individuals, on to any friendly territory, will be acting contrary to the explicit wish of the Royal Netherlands Government, represented by Her Majesty's ambassador at Washington, in the presence of whose representative First-Lieutenant Baron, etc, etc., and to be informed of the extreme gravity and the consequences of the situation arising out of such an action. Read and signed aboard the steam-vessel, etc, in the presence of First-Lieutenant Baron, etc., etc " Sign here, please

KUIPER . You are very anxious for that signature, aren't you ?

DUTCHMAN • No joking, Captain. Time is short. Come on, sign

KUIPER If I sign this, I'll become a pirate, won't I ?

AMERICAN • Damn my soul, I'm a sailor not a lawyer. I . . . Take him to the bridge It's time to sail

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DUTCHMAN · You may signal we're ready.

AMERICAN O K (*Exit*)

DUTCHMAN Can't you read ?

KUIPER Why ?

DUTCHMAN "Acting against the explicit wish of the Royal Netherlands Government and informed of the gravity of the situation and its consequences" Now

KUIPER · What are the consequences ?

DUTCHMAN They asked us to stop you, but we told them that they had police of their own to do that job, and that we would come into action as soon as you should take it into your head to appear in our own territorial waters with your ghost-vessel And let me tell you, Captain, that, although I don't think that there is a country in the world that has done more for Jewish refugees than we have, we would handle you in quite another fashion still, and like it as little as the Americans For with all your Christianity, you're a tool of the very butchers you are trying to save those Jews from You are helping them to terrorise the rest of the civilised world into accepting their unwanted elements in the name of humanity, don't you realise that today it is the Jews that are forced on us, but that tomorrow it may be the butchers themselves ? What would you do if you were lying here not with a shipload of Jews, but a shipload of sadists ? Would you still be as nice and Christian as you are now ?

KUIPER And what if I lay here with a shipload of Christian Governments, including our own ?

DUTCHMAN Are you willing to become stateless for the sake of those Jews, that's the question! If you are not, give me back that paper, and get the hell out of here. If you are, then what's the difference if it's a bluff or not ?

KUIPER *signs.*

DUTCHMAN : Thank you And now, get ready for sailing as soon as possible, for we are going to take you outside the three-mile limit. And after that you'll have to get yourself out of this region altogether, because of the regatta

KUIPER . Regatta ?

DUTCHMAN : Yes, didn't you know ? Man! The biggest stunt of the year. Annual races for the Hatteras Cup, the most expensive yachts of all states taking part So better get out of here ; no room for a snail like you amongst those goldfish. And you'd better be quick about it.

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KUIPER Will these waters be closed to navigation, then ?

DUTCHMAN Forbidden, man! For God's sake, don't you start mucking up these races, you're a big enough headache as it is Now, come on, make it snappy! It's day now

KUIPER And they start today ?

DUTCHMAN Yes At midday, American time Now hurry, or am I to take over command ?

KUIPER And how long do they last ?

DUTCHMAN Great God, man, what is the point ? Four days And now, off with you!

KUIPER One question, sir This ship This ship is Netherlands territory, isn't it ? I mean in the eyes of the law American law

DUTCHMAN Of course A ship is territory of the country whose colours she flies But what *(As KUIPER starts laughing)* What's funny about it ? *(As KUIPER starts laughing heartily.)* What's the matter ? *(As KUIPER roars with laughter.)* What the hell ?

KUIPER *(slapping him on the shoulder)* Brother! Baron! A drink! You shall have a drink! A drink on the ambassador! On Holland! On the clergyman! But never try to tell me again that your name is etcetera Your name is Gabriel! . My God! I was ready for everything but for this

DUTCHMAN . What ?

KUIPER That an angel would look like this

DUTCHMAN Like ?

KUIPER *This ' ' (Pulls open the door, whistles, calls) Number one, Meyer! (Hurries to the table, tears open a drawer, takes a paper out of it, then his eye falls on something lying in it, and after a moment's hesitation, he takes it out It is a folded flag Then he begins to write hastily, the OFFICER standing by dazed all the time)*

MEYER enters, followed by DAVELAAR.

MEYER . Did you call, Captain ?

KUIPER . Take this telegram to the sparks, urgent Get ready to sail and hoist this flag in the fore-top. Hurry! *(To the OFFICER)* Come, Gabriel! *(And disappears with the stricken Baron in the red glow of the dawn.)*

DAVELAAR *(to MEYER, who has been left gaping with the flag in his right hand and the paper in his left)* What does it say ? I can't read it

MEYER : So help me . . .

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DAVELAAR Don't chatter, man, read! Don't you understand that our lives are at stake?

MEYER Our lives?

DAVELAAR Read, damn you!

MEYER (*reads aloud*) "To Anna Kuiper, Helder, Holland Dear wife, I have got to choose Deny my faith and keep everything, or keep my faith and lose everything Answer for you and the children, what am I to do? Joris"

DAVELAAR What's that boy up to?

Then the flag falls open which MEYER keeps in his hand, a dirty white flag with a black cross

MEYER The old man's flag of the cross!

In the stupefied silence, the curtain falls for the end of the second act

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

Act Three

The Captain's cabin on The Young Nelly, four days after the second act Sunset No swish from the sea, no thud from the engine Silence In the silence a melancholy nasal singing, the prayer of the Jewish cantor, answered by the men's chorus Somewhere a bell is tolling monotonously As the curtain rises, HENKY is alone on the stage, walking nervously to and fro as if he were waiting for someone, in the meantime learning something by heart that seems to be written on the small scrap of paper he is crumpling and unfolding all the time He tries to pretend he is not interested in what is going on outside, but when the singing stops suddenly, as well as the tolling of the bell, he cannot help tip-toeing to the door He tries to see as much as he can without leaving the safety of the room, what he sees makes him take off his cap.

KUIPER (*off stage, clearly and quietly in the silence*) One Two Three, in God's name

A rasping noise, a splash, then the lament of the Jews breaks out and

HENKY *scurries back, for off stage hurried steps are drawing near*

DAVELAAR (*in the doorway, shortsighted*) You there, doctor? Hey! (*Seizes HENKY who was trying to slip out*) What are you doing here?

HENKY. Nothing, Chief

DAVELAAR What's that you've got in your hand?

HENKY Nothing, Chief

DAVELAAR. Give it to me

HENKY: It it's nothing, Chief!

DAVELAAR (*wrests the piece of paper from HENKY'S hand, tries to read it*) What's written on it?

HENKY: Nothing, Chief

DAVELAAR. Now?

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

HENKY Mat Mathias .

DAVELAAR Mathias ? What's the big idea ?

HENKY No nothing, Chief

KUIPER *enters in his best uniform, followed by the DOCTOR, looking like a scarecrow*

KUIPER What's going on here ?

DAVELAAR (*as HENKY escapes*) Nothing, Chief

KUIPER Go to the engine-room, as soon as the *Amsterdam's* boat comes alongside, we'll be sailing on

DAVELAAR Ay, ay, Captain (*Tries to make a sign to the DOCTOR behind KUIPER's back*)

KUIPER (*noticing it*) Anything else ?

DAVELAAR No, Captain (*Exit*)

KUIPER (*to the DOCTOR, who is staring fixedly at the door*) What have you done with those papers ?

DOCTOR (*starts*) Beg your pardon ?

KUIPER That death certificate Where did you put it ?

DOCTOR Oh, here, Captain (*Opens the drawer of the table and takes some papers out*) Here you are, Captain.

KUIPER (*looking them over*) Perhaps you would be kind enough to shave and change before Captain Bruinsma comes on board At the burial you looked like a ghost

DOCTOR Very appropriate, don't you think ? Being ship's doctor on a ghost-vessel

KUIPER . A stroke ? I'm afraid you'll have to rewrite that form.

DOCTOR Why ?

KUIPER . You give the cause of death as a stroke.

DOCTOR . I did

KUIPER But the man poisoned himself, didn't he ?

DOCTOR . He had a strong predisposition to apoplexy

KUIPER : But did he die of it ?

DOCTOR I gave a stroke as the cause of death in order to spare you, Captain

KUIPER Me ?

DOCTOR I warned you beforehand The responsibility for this death rests with you.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER The burial form has to be signed by two of the passengers
See to that, will you ?

DOCTOR . If you had taken these people back the day I warned you,
you would have saved a life

KUIPER For the concentration camp ?

DOCTOR Nonsense Nothing will happen to those men on their return

KUIPER And you can still say that After what you saw happen
twice with your own eyes ?

DOCTOR What I saw doesn't matter I don't believe all that trash
After all we are living in the twentieth century

KUIPER It seems to be the slogan of the twentieth century I saw
it but I don't believe it

DOCTOR Captain, I I'll warn you just once more, for the last
time, and God knows it is the last time For three days now . (*He
stops, for DAVELAAR has opened the door and given him a menacing sign*)

KUIPER (*who hasn't seen it*) Well ?

DOCTOR Beg your pardon ?

KUIPER You were going to warn me

DOCTOR That's to say

KUIPER About a mutiny

DOCTOR . How . What made you think of that ?

KUIPER . Didn't you say so ?

DOCTOR No . Not at all I should like to ask you something.

KUIPER Go ahead

DOCTOR I you mustn't think it strange, but did you ever
fall on the back of your head ?

KUIPER : Why ?

DOCTOR Do you ever feel dizzy sometimes ? Or get any sudden
headaches ?

KUIPER . No

DOCTOR Captain, I'll put my cards on the table I have been asked
to certify you as insane

KUIPER . By whom ?

.DOCTOR : By nobody and everybody

KUIPER If you think I'm insane, go ahead. Then it is your duty.

DOCTOR : I'll go ahead, skipper, even if I don't think so I can't
watch this torture any longer You won't listen to reason. So I must

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

make use of the chance I've been given of eliminating you without bloodshed. Yes, because I believe that to be my duty.

KUIPER: You and the other gentlemen have chosen your time badly, I must say.

DOCTOR: You mean the arrival of the *Amsterdam*? No, Captain. My colleague Willemse will certainly sign the certificate with me as soon as I have explained the situation. Captain Bruinsma will cover us with his authority and perhaps he'll be willing to take you aboard his ship to transfer you to hospital.

KUIPER: And then?

DOCTOR: Then Mate Meyer will take over command and take the Jews back.

KUIPER: I see.

DOCTOR: And as for the Maritime Court, Captain, the Government has had two representatives aboard this ship, an officer and a clergyman. Those two will most certainly swear to it that you were in an abnormal state of mind at the time they paid their visit.

KUIPER: Who's plan is this, the Baron's?

DOCTOR: You called him an angel from heaven, the day before yesterday.

KUIPER: Don't you start calling him that, doctor.

DOCTOR: Captain, be sensible. You have only one possibility left. Take these men back of your own free will. Spare yourself this misery and me the part of a Judas. You don't know.

KUIPER: All right. I'll spare you the part of a Judas. Call them in.

DOCTOR: Who?

KUIPER: The other gentlemen on the committee.

DOCTOR: You . . . you give in?

KUIPER: Call them.

DOCTOR: Captain! Let me implore you . . .

KUIPER: Call them, doctor.

DOCTOR: This will mean a mutiny.

KUIPER: Let's have it!

The DOCTOR opens the door after a moment's hesitation, and reveals MEYER and DAVELAAR, who have obviously been eavesdropping. They recover themselves and enter.

KUIPER: Is Captain Bruinsma on board yet?

MEYER: Alongside, Captain.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER Then pack your things and get ready to leave You're under arrest, both of you

MEYER Under arrest? Why?

KUIPER. For incitement to insubordination

MEYER But the whole ship——

KUIPER The whole ship will know who's the boss here as soon as you're taken off in irons And now get out!

MEYER That's asking for murder, Captain! The crew will be throwing——

KUIPER —lumps of coal at your heads! Do you think I don't know my crew? No wonder you never rose to be a captain, Meyer You're an idiot (*To the DOCTOR*) And you start rolling pills mighty quick, before I have you arrested with the rest (*To BRUINSMA, who has appeared in the doorway and knocked on the doorpost*) Come in, Captain (*To the others*) Get under steam Course north-north-east, half speed for the boat alongside Hurry!

MEYER Captain .

KUIPER Get out! (*After they have gone, to BRUINSMA*) Good evening (*Holds out his hand*)

BRUINSMA Let me have a look first. (*Takes him by the shoulders and turns him to the light*) How's the holy fire? (*Looks into his eyes*) Dying down a bit, eh?

KUIPER. I'm glad you are here

BRUINSMA Who was that you put overboard a minute ago?

KUIPER One of the passengers Suicide

BRUINSMA The first one?

KUIPER Yes.

BRUINSMA. And the last one? (*As KUIPER does not reply*) Rather a responsibility, young man But never mind Jews' lives are cheap nowadays.

KUIPER: The death of that man wasn't my fault, if that's what you mean.

BRUINSMA. Of course not It was God's will, I suppose

KUIPER: It was

BRUINSMA: H'm. I can understand that a Christian who finds his house robbed says, it was God's will that I was robbed, but that the thief says, it was His will that I committed a burglary?

KUIPER. When God spoke, the man was already dead.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

BRUINSMA Spoke ? How ?

KUIPER Through the mouth of a baron

BRUINSMA And what did the baron say ?

KUIPER Nine miles away from here the annual regatta for the Hatteras Cup is in progress, with the most expensive yachts of all states taking part

BRUINSMA And ?

KUIPER If I send out an S O S those yachts will be obliged to come and pick up my boats, won't they ?

BRUINSMA If they are the vessels nearest to you, yes But what of it ?

KUIPER If I scuttle my ship and those yachts pick up my boats, then the Jews will be on American territory, with the full knowledge of public opinion

BRUINSMA (*after a short motionless silence*) If you scuttle your ship, I should reckon you'll get three years for that

KUIPER Five I looked it up

BRUINSMA And you will never be allowed to command a ship for the rest of your life

KUIPER No

BRUINSMA So you intend to go down with your ship, I take it

KUIPER Suicide ? You know little about Christianity.

BRUINSMA Of course, pardon me I forgot the attraction of martyrdom

KUIPER I won't be a martyr if I do it

BRUINSMA No You'll only be a fool. The martyrs will be these. (*Points to the portrait*)

KUIPER : My children will have a richer inheritance in an unbroken faith than in a ship and a bag of money.

BRUINSMA I hope for the sake of your children your wife won't agree. Does she know about this ?

KUIPER : I telegraphed to her.

BRUINSMA : And ? What was her answer ?

KUIPER She hasn't answered yet.

BRUINSMA . I see

The engine-room bell rings out below, the engine starts chudding.
You said ? Where ?

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER Into the course of the regatta

BRUINSMA So you're not waiting for her approval ?

KUIPER I hope for her help

BRUINSMA And if it doesn't come ?

KUIPER Then I shall still not be alone.

BRUINSMA So! And now we close that Bible! Yes! It's time now that you learned to distinguish between Christianity and decency, young man

KUIPER I don't get you

BRUINSMA For two thousand years we have been pestering our Lord Don't you think the moment has come to leave Him in peace for a time ? What do you think I should have done in your place two months ago, in South America ? Taken those Jews back ?

KUIPER You made it plain enough at the time.

BRUINSMA No, my dear Christian I would have done exactly as you did, and not because I am a Christian, but because I am a plain decent man. You fellows can't even be decent without the help of God You murder, steal, burn, lie, the moment He lets you go But am I a murderer ? A thief, a liar ? No I am a decent man without pestering God For if God has given us a law, it is we who have to obey it, not He

KUIPER . Then I hand over my command to you.

BRUINSMA What ?

KUIPER Then I ask you to take over my ship You seem to have enough spirit left to carry on I have not If the cause of decency really means something to you, take over my post

BRUINSMA You would renounce the glory of martyrdom ?

KUIPER . Gladly

BRUINSMA . And for what would you exchange it ?

KUIPER . For home. My wife, knitting in the lamplight, and my children and I at a game of snakes and ladders

BRUINSMA Your ambition doesn't aim any higher ?

KUIPER Can it aim higher ?

BRUINSMA Then you ought to be consistent and not wreck that family for the sake of an idle fancy. Then you ought to take these Jews back without a moment's delay

KUIPER : How can that be decent now, and not two months ago ?

BRUINSMA : Because what you are proposing now ceases to be decent.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER And begins to be Christian You see You can't do without faith

BRUINSMA If that faith only serves to scuttle a ship, to destroy a family, and to make a man's life valueless for the future, you can keep your faith

KUIPER Is it decency that makes you forget those Jews ?

BRUINSMA (*after a short pause*) All right How far away are those yachts ?

KUIPER Nine miles, north-north-east

BRUINSMA And you're making ?

KUIPER Eight

BRUINSMA Then reckon that it'll take me half an hour to get far enough away for you to give your S O S Otherwise I might be compelled to pick up your Jews myself, and that's not the idea Anything else I can do for you ?

KUIPER . I don't think so

BRUINSMA No drinking water, stores, drugs ? That's why I am here, you know

KUIPER Thank you, too late now Only, I've got two prisoners, mutineers, what am I to do with them ?

BRUINSMA Set them free before you go down. Anything more ?

KUIPER Yes. A declaration I drew up to save my officers from prosecution Would you mind having a look at it and tell me if it's in order ?

BRUINSMA *takes out his spectacles* KUIPER *gives him a paper and he reads* Then he gives the paper back.
All right ?

BRUINSMA I wish I were your father.

KUIPER . My father would have done exactly the same thing, of that I am certain

BRUINSMA But why ? You're not a family of lunatics, are you ? What's the point of this act of madness ?

KUIPER . That God, if He troubles to make His will known to us, will provide the means to fulfill it That much I have proved.

BRUINSMA . Not yet, young man, not yet! Your ship is still afloat and within half an hour the world can come to an end (*At the door.*) I'll stand by my wireless If I don't hear your S.O.S. I'll give my whole crew a double ration, out of pure satisfaction. If I do hear it, then I hope that God of yours, if He exists, will one day save my soul too, if I've got such a thing. Good-bye. (*Exit.*)

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

The moment he has gone, Chief DAVELAAR stalks in, very worked up

DAVELAAR So! Now the moment has come!

KUIPER Hey, what's this? Who is at the engine?

DAVELAAR Your father would have done exactly the same thing, eh? He stands by your side, does he? That's why you hoisted that flag of the cross, because of what he wrote into that damned Bible!

KUIPER Go back to your post!

DAVELAAR If he is standing by your side now, he can whisper into your ear that I am telling you the truth! Do you know what that flag is, that flies from your foretop now? The dirty shirt of the devil! . No, no, let me go. The truth! If the memory of your father is holy to you, then listen to the truth! Listen to the story of the flag of the cross! You don't know it!

KUIPER (*who has dragged him to the door, lets him go*) If you say one word against my father——

DAVELAAR If I say one word that isn't true, may I fall dead on the spot, so help me God!

KUIPER Put that hand down!

DAVELAAR. New Guinea, twenty years ago. In debt to every shop-keeper in the East. Three more days and the ship would have been put on a chain by the bailiff, and no cargo, nowhere. Then two missionaries came aboard, out of a jungle port, fifty miles over east. Your father asked them in order to talk about the Bible. But those missionaries told him that they had a nice little deal for him. For over two years they'd raised heaven all over the jungle and what did they teach those poor niggers? "Out of every two coco-nuts you cut down you have to put one aside for Jesus." The missionaries would see to the delivery to heaven. Now there they sat, their rat's eyes glittering in the candlelight, and offered your father Christ's coco-nuts at half price because he was a brother. One moment I thought your father would kill them, for he turned as white as a sheet, but he kept hold of himself. But after they had gone he weighed anchor and out we sailed to that jungle port fifty miles over east.

KUIPER What for?

DAVELAAR. I'll tell you. He got the bo'sun to make a flag, a white flag with a black cross, the thing you are flying now. He got the third officer to put on a night shirt, and a beard of twine, gave him a piece of copper steam pipe bent like a shepherd's crook. When the boy was put on top of the railing, he made him sing "Abide with me". Then your father went ashore with the boat to tell the niggers Jesus had come to take his coco-nuts away.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

MEYER enters with a telegram, but stops short, frightened, and stays to listen, unobserved

The niggers seemed to be going mad. They leapt and yelped and flung their children up in the air, and set all the sleeping monkeys jabbering. Then the first canoe came out, bursting with coco-nuts. And as we weighed anchor at sunset we were lying over the mark with the nuts of Jesus, for nothing. No, don't touch me! The truth, I swear! I—— (*Sees MEYER, who has tried to hide in vain*) There! There he is! There is the proof! It was him! He was Jesus!

MEYER (*after a terrified silence, during which KUIPER stares at him motionless*) Telegram, Captain

DAVELAAR (*whispering hotly*) Tell him! Tell him it was you that played Jesus in the old man's night-shirt. Tell him, man! Open your trap, damn you!

MEYER Yes, Captain, that's right. But——

KUIPER sits down heavily at the table and covers his face with his hands. But, Captain, look here, I couldn't help it, I was just a boy.

DAVELAAR Shut up!

Takes the telegram out of MEYER'S hands, pushes him out of the door. Then he stands for a moment looking at KUIPER, who is sitting motionless. He puts the telegram on the table and whispers behind

KUIPER

I'm sorry, Joris, it had to go so far. I warned you, kid. The moment you laid your hands on the ship. . . Come on. Come to your senses. Don't torture yourself any longer. Take those Jews back. Come, I know you like her as much as I do, you couldn't really sink her, the ship you've lived on all your life? What would you be without her—without the sea—for ever? It would be suicide, Joris, more than if you went down with her. Without *The Young Nelly* you would be a dead man, your father would haunt you for the rest of your life and so would she. So take those Jews back. . . . Take them back.

As KUIPER does not react, he hesitates a moment, then goes to the door on tiptoe and disappears without a sound. For a short time KUIPER remains alone. Darkness is gathering in the cabin. Then the door is opened stealthily and HENKY slips in.

HENKY (*in a nervous whisper*) Captain! Captain, write it down. Write it down before I forget it! Mathias . . .

DAVELAAR (*like an ogre in the doorway*): Pst!

DAVELAAR beckons HENKY out of the door; he obeys like a charmed snake. DAVELAAR grabs him by the ear and closes the door, after dragging him out.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER *remains alone again, only the engine thuds in the silence*
He does not move, but sits as though asleep Then someone knocks
at the door feebly, louder, then urgently As there is no answer the
door opens hesitatingly and the RABBI appears

RABBI · Captain .² Captain .

As KUIPER doesn't answer, the RABBI comes in and stops halfway

RABBI Captain I don't want to disturb you, but (*At KUIPER's side.*) Only the contents, Captain My people . (*Then he sees the telegram on the table, makes a move as if to take it up, controls himself and then taps KUIPER on the shoulder*) Captain Captain!

KUIPER (*looking up quietly*) What do you want?

RABBI Only the contents, Captain We heard that it had come and now my people have sent me to ask you what it says Couldn't you tell me?

KUIPER What?

RABBI The telegram, Captain The telegram from the committee in America

KUIPER I got no telegram.

RABBI But I thought Excuse me, but . . . (*Pointing at the paper*) Isn't this it, Captain?

KUIPER takes it and reads

What . . . What is it?

KUIPER (*reads out*) "Must postpone decision eight weeks owing to Senate recess Our prayers go with you"

RABBI Eight weeks .

KUIPER · And within half an hour the world can come to an end.

RABBI (*after a pause*) · Do you still not understand?

KUIPER · What?

RABBI: That you are putting yourself between us and our God?

KUIPER looks.

RABBI · All these weeks I have kept silent because I, too, am only human and frail, and very afraid of pain. But whatever I might have hoped as a human being, Captain, as a man of God, I knew . . .

KUIPER: What?

RABBI: What every Jew knows from the Talmud! The anathema of the Pentateuch is upon us! "Cursed shalt thou be in the city and cursed shalt thou be in the field, cursed shall be thy basket and thy store, cursed shall be the fruit of thy body and the fruit of thy land.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out Thou shalt betroth a wife and another man shall lie with her Thou shalt build a house and another man shall dwell therein. Thou shalt plant a vineyard and another man shall garner the grapes thereof Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes and thou shalt not eat thereof Thine ass shall be taken away from before thy face and shall not be restored to thee Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people and thine eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all the day long and there shall be no might in thy hands And thou shalt grope at noonday as the blind gropeth in darkness—an astonishment, a proverb, a byword among all nations ”

KUIPER And God's mercy ?

RABBI Come! Come with me to the hold Look at my people Where is their fear, where their despair ? On the threshold of eternity they stand Only a short pain and we shall be free Then our souls will spread their wings in the unbounded space of God's glory That is His mercy, to open His arms after the debt is paid If Israel is a lesson to you, rejoice then We have gone before in sin, we have gone before in punishment, now we go before in grace Come Don't let us yearn any longer after the promised land . Take us back

KUIPER You want that ?

RABBI . God wills it Take us back.

He disappears in the darkness like a shadow KUIPER stays alone with his despair He stands for a moment, then goes to the coat-hooks, folds the towel round his neck, puts on his oilskins and finally his cap Then as he is about to go to the door, it is opened stealthily again and HENKY enters.

HENKY : Captain, Captain, write it down, I can't remember it any longer! Mathias . . Mathias 10, 37 and 38 That's the telegram.

KUIPER . Telegram ?

HENKY . The telegram from your wife, that Mr. Meyer and Chief Davelaar held back

KUIPER : My wife! Where is it ?

HENKY I haven't got it, Captain! I didn't dare snatch it away! I had nothing to do with it, I had nothing to do with the mutiny, the whole day long I tried to warn you, but all the time you were somewhere else, and then I was swabbing Chief Davelaar's cabin and then Mr Meyer came in with the telegram and he read it out and then Chief Davelaar said : "If he gets his paws on to that everything is lost. Give here!" and he put it under his palliase. But I remembered it, Captain, and even after he took the bit of paper I remembered it.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

Mathias, 7 and 8, 10! No, that wasn't it Mathias, 7 and 3
Oh, Captain Mathias, 37, 8 3 Oh, Captain . I've forgotten
it !

KUIPER Matthew 10, 37 and 38 you said the first time Is that it ?

HENKY Got it, Matthew! Matthew 10, 37 and 38 Or was it
37, 10 ?

KUIPER (*takes the Bible out of the bunk, brings it to the table*) Light!

HENKY Ay, ay, Captain! (*Tries to reach the switch*) I can't get to
it, Captain (*As KUIPER is flicking over the pages*) Wait a moment,
wait a moment I've got matches (*Strikes one on his trousers*) Here
.. here you are, Captain Is Mathy Matthew in the Bible, Captain ?
I didn't know that I thought (*Burns himself*) Ow, hell! Oh,
excuse me, Captain I have I will Here, here (*Strikes*
another) Here you are, Captain Can you see like that ?

KUIPER Matthew 10, 37 "He that loveth father or mother more
than me is not worthy of me He that loveth son or daughter more
than me is not worthy of me, and he that taketh not his cross and
followeth after me is not worthy of me"

HENKY Who says that, Captain ? Mathias ?

KUIPER : Jesus.

HENKY . To whom, Captain ?

KUIPER . To me (*Closes the Bible*) Call the Rabbi

HENKY . Ay, Captain .

KUIPER And Mr Meyer, and Chief Davelaar and the Doctor and
the two other gentlemen, quick!

HENKY Ay, ay, Captain (*Exit*)

KUIPER *stands for a moment, then goes to the portrait and switches
on the light, goes to the table, takes a piece of paper out of the drawer
and writes. The RABBI appears in the doorway, knocks on the post*

RABBI : Captain . . !

KUIPER Rabbi, we were wrong. It is not God's will that you go
back. Tonight you will be on American territory and tomorrow you
will be free

RABBI : That . . That's impossible

MEYER *and the DOCTOR enter.*

MEYER : Did you call us, Captain ?

KUIPER : Yes. Has the Chief been told ?

MEYER . I think so, Captain The boy . .

DAVELAAR *appears followed by the TWO JEWS*

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

DAVELAAR Now what's going on here? The whole ship

KUIPER I have a statement to make

DAVELAAR Oh I see Come in, boys, come in

He drags in the two frightened Jews and closes the door triumphantly

KUIPER Gentlemen, I have called you in for an official statement Three times now I have tried to set my passengers ashore in the United States of America, and three times I have failed Convinced, that any further attempts would be contrary to the interests of the ship and those on board, I have decided on an emergency measure. A couple of miles from here the annual regatta for the Hatteras Cup is in progress, with the most expensive yachts of all states taking part At any moment from now, after everyone has taken to the boats, I will send out an SOS, and as soon as the yachts are sighted, I will scuttle my ship by an explosion in the propeller-shaft It is the only means left to me to get my passengers taken on to American territory with the full knowledge of public opinion

DAVELAAR You can't do that! You have no right to!

KUIPER My position as owner makes it unnecessary to consult the ship's committee But in order to avoid all disagreeable consequences for my officers, I have drawn up the declaration I will read to you now (*Reads out*) "I, Kuiper, Joris, skipper next to God of the vessel *The Young Nelly* declare hereby that I have scuttled my ship intentionally and forcibly against the energetic protest of all members of the ship's committee And so I declare myself to be thus solely and entirely responsible for this act. Drawn up on board *The Young Nelly*, and signed by six witnesses" (*Takes a pen and dips it into the ink and holds it out*) Number one!

MEYER Ay, Captain.

KUIPER Sign here.

MEYER But, Captain, look here . .

KUIPER Sign!

MEYER *signs*. KUIPER *gives him a paper*.

Take this to the sparks and as soon as the yachts are sighted, open the hooter and turn the searchlights straight up in full strength. Hurry!

MEYER Ay, ay, Captain

KUIPER Davelaar!

DAVELAAR Never!

KUIPER This is an order

* DAVELAAR I refuse.

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER I give you the choice, to sign or to be prosecuted for mutiny and sabotage I'll count three. One Two

DAVELAAR *snatches the pen out of his hand and signs*

KUIPER Go below and put three ice-bombs in the propeller-shaft with a five-minute fuse

DAVELAAR Am I to send my ship to hell with my own bloody hands? The ship I have sailed on for thirty years! I've got nothing else in the world! I have no wife and no children! I have no God!

KUIPER If you don't want to, I'll do it myself

DAVELAAR No! (*Exit*)

KUIPER Doctor!

DOCTOR Captain, I must say

KUIPER Thank you

DOCTOR *signs*

Arrange everything for your sick boat and don't forget your papers. Hurry!

DOCTOR Yes, Captain

KUIPER Rabbi!

RABBI *signs*

And you, gentlemen

The two Jews sign

Thank you You are responsible for order You've got five minutes Go ahead

SECOND JEW Captain, one word . (*And bursts into tears*)

RABBI *signs to the other Jew, who takes him out, calming him*

KUIPER (*left alone with the RABBI, gives him the box*) Rabbi, your papers

RABBI (*takes it*) God bless you

KUIPER . Pray for me

RABBI Always

KUIPER Now (*Exit*)

The RABBI follows him wearily with the box, colliding in the doorway with the DOCTOR who is followed by HENKY carrying his bag

RABBI : Oh, I'm sorry.

DOCTOR : All right, go ahead.

RABBI : No, no, after you

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

KUIPER (*off stage, whistle*) Ready, all hands! Lower starboard!

RABBI Oh! (*And hurries out*)

DOCTOR (*goes to the medicine cupboard and opens it*) So there we go for the last time Take this! (*Begins to fill the bag with bottles, etc*)

HENKY Are we going to sink now, doctor?

DOCTOR Yes Put the cotton-wool down the side Next to the bottles

HENKY And are we going aboard little wind-jammers?

DOCTOR Yes No, down the side, down the side

KUIPER (*off stage, whistle*) Let go, starboard! Ready, port!

HENKY Do you think one is allowed to laugh in heaven, doctor?

DOCTOR What?

HENKY I should like awfully to become a Christian But since we left South America, I haven't laughed once, and I should like to so much

DOCTOR To laugh or to become a Christian?

HENKY Both I don't quite know what to choose

DOCTOR Ask the Captain He'll tell you

HENKY The Captain is a saint

DOCTOR The Captain is a maniac

HENKY A saint! I know he is! He got a telegram from Jesus

KUIPER (*off stage, whistle*) Let go, port Stand by, dinghy. Mind your hands there, hands in!

DOCTOR Now just how old are you?

HENKY Eighteen . Oh, no, doctor, fourteen. And I pinched your lotion and steamed open the letters from your girl.

DOCTOR: You're telling me

HENKY: You knew?

DOCTOR: Ha! Bigger thief never sailed

HENKY I'll never do it again, doctor, never!

DOCTOR: Likely story.

HENKY. Never! I'll never laugh and never steal I'll become a Christian, just like the Captain.

DOCTOR (*who has opened the settee and looked helplessly at the contents*): Here, your tropical helmet! You forgot to take it with you two months ago

SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD

HENKY (*holding out his hand greedily*) Yes! (*Takes his hand back*) No!

DOCTOR • What's the matter? Take it!

HENKY No I don't want it any more

DOCTOR My God! The only thing he has got in an honest way, and that he lets sink

HENKY There's nothing I'd like more, doctor, than that hat But I want to do something too The Captain is scuttling his ship, I scuttle my hat

The hooter of The Young Nelly starts roaring—a long-drawn continuous cry of despair

DOCTOR Hurry, there they go!

They stuff the rest into the bag like mad

KUIPER *hurries in*

KUIPER What's the matter with you? Do you want to drown?

DOCTOR Are they coming?

KUIPER The whole skyline is full of them! Get into the boat, quick!

They hurry off, he calls after them

Keep room for me, I'm coming, straight away!

He collects, in a great hurry, papers, Bible and portrait The moment he has taken it off the wall, two, three muffled explosions from below make everything clatter and shudder in the cabin The lights go out The hooter is silent The stage becomes dark But out of the silence comes a new sound the JEWS start cheering in the distance, singing, a faraway chant of rejoicing Then a swinging light draws rapidly near off stage

DAVELAAR *appears in the doorway with a lantern in his hand.*

DAVELAAR Joris, we are sinking! Joris! (*Then he discovers KUIPER, who is kneeling on the floor. He goes to his side*) Look at him! Look at him, the skipper next to God! His country gone, his church gone, his father gone, his ship gone, and what does he say now?

KUIPER (*getting up*) The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord

When he hurries out, the curtain falls for the end of the play

NO ROOM AT THE INN

BY

Joan Temple

CANDIDUS in *The Daily Sketch*, February 10th, 1945

“Are we, as a nation, fulfilling our responsibilities to the children, who should be our greatest treasure—and on whom depend all our hopes for the future?”

Re the Remand Homes enquiry—Leader in The Daily Telegraph, February 23rd, 1945

“Unfortunately the Committee were obsessed by a horror of publicity. They never speak out. ‘The work of the Council’s officers’, they could not but find, had ‘remoteness and sluggishness of operation’.

“The blame was laid upon the administration which had well earned it, and no doubt in those quarters the publicity has been found distressing. There should be more of it.”

CAST

NORMA SMITH	Joan Dowling
JUDITH DRAVE	Ursula Howells
IRENE SAUNDERS	Valerie Forrest
LILY ROBINS	Billie Brook
RONNIE CHILBURY	John Potter
MARY O'RAHE	Mary Kimber
KATE GRANT	Ruth Dunning
MR BURRELLS (<i>Bulleting Officer</i>)	Tony Quinn
INSPECTOR WILLIS	Neville Brook
MRS VORAY	Freda Jackson
MRS WATERS	Doris Rogers
TERENCE O'RAHE	David Laing
MR BOWKEN	Alfred Hirst
THE REV JAMES ALLWORTH	Christopher Steele

First presented at the Embassy Theatre on Tuesday, July 10th, 1945

Produced by ANTHONY HAWTREY

All applications for performing rights in this play should be addressed to the author's agents, Messrs Curtis Brown, Ltd, 6, Henrietta Street, London, W.C 2.

PROLOGUE

The living-room of a small house in a "safe area", one morning in February.

ACT I

Scene 1 The same A late afternoon in the previous September.

Scene 2. The same. A Saturday evening Two weeks later.

ACT II

Scene 1 The Rev James Allworth's study ten days later

Scene 2 The same as Act I. Some weeks later

ACT III

Scene 1 The same. One night in February.

Scene 2. Mrs. Voray's bedroom later the same night.

EPILOGUE

The same as the Prologue. The following morning.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

Prologue

SCENE *The living-room of a small house in a "safe area" one morning in February. It is about noon by the sun, which streams through the partly drawn blackout of window L, showing up painfully the sordidness of the room. In spite of the sunshine the electric light is burning in the C pendant, and the table, C, still bears the remains of last night's supper, with an overturned beer bottle on table, and two "empties" on the floor. On table lies a sodden cloth handbag. In C of back wall is a door leading into a minute hall and to front door off L. Part of upper staircase is indicated, but this is largely masked by a hall-stand with mirror just outside the living-room door. The fireplace (combined open grate and oven) is across top R corner. The grate is full of dead ashes and crumpled paper. The mantelpiece is crowded with cheap ornaments, a clock that has stopped, and an untidy array of letters and bills. Up R. is a door opening into the scullery and the back door. Down R. is a sideboard, as untidy as the rest of the room, with the contents of an old work-basket spilling over the lower corner. A broken-down couch with a back and low arms R C, its motheaten cushions flung down anyhow. An armchair with a cushion in the seat L C faces the lower end of couch. A chair R. of table, others set untidily about*

it

When curtain rises the scullery door is wide open, door C. closed. The stage is empty. Then children's voices can be heard off R, and the back door is heard to open. Enter NORMA SMITH. She is about thirteen, but looks older, and is full of Cockney shrewdness. She looks dirty and is poorly clad, but even so there are indications that she has made some effort to look like her favourite film star. She comes fearfully into the room, then makes an obvious effort to speak casually

NORMA : She ain't—she isn't up yet, m'm.

Enter JUDITH DRAVE, an attractive young woman about twenty-five. She is followed by IRENE SAUNDERS (twelve), LILY ROBBINS (twelve),

NO ROOM AT THE INN

and RONNIE CHILBURY (*ten*) *The children are all miserably clad and very far from clean*

JUDITH *stares about her with distaste, then she goes to door C and calls*

JUDITH Mrs Voray! Mrs Voray!

In the silence that follows the CHILDREN look at each other in fearful uncertainty, which, in the case of NORMA, has an odd secretiveness about it JUDITH turns back into the room, and at that moment MARY O'RANE enters R She is a dark, tense little thing about twelve She stands in the doorway and stares at Judith They all stand silent and still for a moment, listening, waiting Then RONNIE rushes over to the couch, flings himself on his knees and buries his face in the cushions

JUDITH (*perplexed, looking up*) Who turned on the light?

NORMA I did, Mrs Drave

JUDITH And left it burning all the morning? Why didn't you turn it off when you came to school?

NORMA *is sulkily silent*

(*As she goes L to turn off light*) Undo the blackout, one of you.

NORMA Can't reach

JUDITH (*angry because she is perplexed*) Not if you stood on a chair?
She pulls chair from table to window, mounts and undraws curtains, whereupon the room is filled with wintry sunshine As she steps down her attention is caught by someone outside the window She draws the dirty curtain aside, knocks and beckons

Norma, Miss Grant is outside Run and ask her to come in, will you?

IRENE (*seeing NORMA makes no move*) I'll go, Mrs Drave! (*She hurries off C and front door is heard to open Speaking off*) Mrs Drave wants you to come in, she says.

Front door is shut Enter KATE GRANT C She is about forty, with a neat style about her clothes which suggests that she knows how to spend what little money she has She has an air of good breeding which does not obscure her warm-heartedness Re-enter IRENE.

KATE (*as she enters*) I really ought not to come in, Mrs. Drave. (*Suddenly struck by the unusualness of the situation*) But why are you here? Is anything wrong?

JUDITH: You can see for yourself—

She indicates the room KATE's eyes light on the table, then turn questioningly to JUDITH.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

Yes, last night's supper things! And I managed to get out of Mary O'Rane that the children all came to school without their breakfast She fainted away in class

KATE (*turning*) Oh, Mary!

JUDITH So the headmistress thought I'd better come and investigate

KATE And Mrs Voray isn't up even now?

JUDITH (*shrugging*) I called up to her, but I got no answer

KATE The—bottles might explain——

JUDITH The bottles explain much, but not everything Hang it all, you'd expect her to have slept it off by now!

MARY, *with a sudden movement, goes to couch and sits After a moment she slides her hand along to touch* RONNIE

KATE Yes Yes, I suppose so (*To NORMA*) Has she ever been as late as this before?

NORMA (*sullenly*) Couldn't say, miss

JUDITH Nonsense! Of course she can say! Has Mrs Voray ever missed giving you your breakfast before? (*No answer Turning to the others.*) Have you ever come to school without breakfast before? Mary?—All of you lost your tongues?

MARY (*with a face closed up like the rest*) No, Mrs Drave!

JUDITH And what do you mean by "No, Mrs Drave"? That you *haven't* come to school without your breakfast before this morning?

The CHILDREN's glances meet but no one answers

(*Exasperated*) I take it, then, that you *have*!

LILY • Oh, no, Mrs Drave! We've always had our breakfasts before

KATE (*who has been watching their faces*) • Did Mrs Voray give you your breakfast? (*No answer*) Perhaps she left it all ready for you. (*No answer*)

JUDITH But, surely, Norma, *you* could have got something for the children to eat?

NORMA (*sullenly*) • No, I couldn't

JUDITH And why not? (*No answer.*) What's the matter with you all?

KATE: You'd better call her again

JUDITH *goes to door C and calls*

JUDITH • Mrs. Voray!—Mrs Voray! (*She goes into passage and calls more loudly*) Mrs Voray!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

Silence KATE moves up to door C and when her back is turned, NORMA, LILY and IRENE rush over to couch as though they feel there is safety in closeness to each other They make MARY push up, and RONNIE is forced back on his heels, whereupon MARY drops her hand on to his shoulder MARY is lower end of couch, NORMA beside her JUDITH (calling again) Mis-sis Vor-ay!

When she still receives no answer she comes back into room and looks at KATE with a questioning look that holds something of alarm
Perhaps——? Do you think we'd better go up?

KATE Well—I've been forbidden the house

JUDITH But in the circumstances——? Oh, I'll go up myself Will one of you children turn on the light in the passage for me?

The GIRLS sit and stare at her but make no move
Norma! Come and turn the lights on!

NORMA gives a swift sidelong glance at MARY but does not move
JUDITH (angrily) What on earth's the matter with you all? Well, I suppose I must find my way up somehow!

She goes into passage and in a moment the light is turned on Then she is heard calling again

Mrs Voray!—Are you upstairs, Mrs Voray? (*Reappears at door C*) I suppose she hasn't gone out shopping by any chance? No, she wouldn't have gone out leaving the light on in here (*Again her eyes meet KATE'S Not liking the business*) Well, I'd better go up and see

She turns quickly and goes out She can be heard mounting the stairs calling

Mrs Voray! Mrs Voray, are you in?

The GIRLS sit and stare in front of them KATE goes to door C and listens, then she comes down to couch and looks at MARY, who will not meet her eyes

KATE Mary! We've been friends, haven't we?

MARY (tonelessly) Yes, Miss Grant

KATE Then won't you tell me what's the matter?

JUDITH is heard running down the stairs and KATE turns back towards door to meet her Re-enter JUDITH, her face white

KATE What is it?

JUDITH gives a secret gesture of warning towards the children, then pulls herself together and comes into the room with a forced attempt to be matter-of-fact.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

JUDITH I must write a note Pencil and—and paper ? (*Finds a pencil in her bag*)

KATE (*taking small notebook from her own bag*) Here's my shopping list

She hands notebook to JUDITH, who scribbles quickly, then tears off sheet and hands it to KATE, into whose face comes a look of horror as she reads what JUDITH has written

JUDITH (*uncertainly*) You—you know who to take this to, I imagine ?

KATE I think you must—must take this yourself You—you're in authority here I—I've no standing at all But—*hurry!*

JUDITH All right! I've got my bike outside You—you'll stay with the children ?

KATE Yes, I'll stay!

They exchange looks, then, without taking note, JUDITH hurries off L

JUDITH I'll be as quick as I can

The front door is heard to open but not close KATE drops into a chair beside table and sits staring before her Then she looks across at the children

KATE Do you know—do any of you know—what has happened to Mrs Voray ?

MARY's hand convulsively clasps RONNIE's shoulder, but for that the children make no movement.

(*To NORMA*) I think you know, Norma. Won't you—won't you try and tell me what happened ? (*No answer*) You will have to speak presently I think it would help—help you if you tried to tell me before— (*No answer*) Mary—I'm your friend There's nothing to be frightened about—not now (*No answer*) Norma, when you said just now you couldn't get the breakfast, did you mean— ?

Her eyes drop to the note in her hand With a little shudder she leans her arm on the table and covers her face with her hand, her body shaking All the children's heads turn slowly to watch her In her shaking KATE touches the beer bottle on the table. It falls off and rolls away The children suddenly begin to giggle, then burst into hysterical laughter.

KATE (*sharply*). Oh, don't! For God's sake, be quiet!

The children thrust their fists into their mouths, but their terrible laughter continues Then, as suddenly as they began, they stop as the slam of a car door is heard, followed by men's voices and footsteps coming into the house Again the closed-up, sullen look comes into the children's faces Front door closes

Re-enter JUDITH, as heavy footsteps are heard on the stairs.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

JUDITH I caught the Inspector just coming out of the station. The —the police surgeon was with him. They've—gone up (*Sinks into chair L of table, bitterly*) Rush of populace to doors and windows when they heard the police car, of course (*Looking at KATE, lets out a breath as though she has been holding it for some time*) Oh!

Heavy footsteps overhead. The children's heads rise towards ceiling, then NORMA'S and MARY'S eyes meet

Have you questioned the children, Miss Grant?

KATE (*hopelessly*) Oh—questioned!

JUDITH Don't they know—anything?

KATE I wonder!

JUDITH (*with the tone of quiet authority she knows they have been accustomed to in school*): Children, I want you to tell me what you know about this. Did any of you go into Mrs. Voray's room this morning?

The children make a slight "condensing" movement, as though they wish to get yet closer together

You're all a bit scared, I expect—and that is understandable—but won't you tell me——?

A double knock at front door. JUDITH looks at KATE, then rises

I'd better go

She hurries off L. Front door is heard to open. Voices of JUDITH and MR. BURRELLS off, speaking quietly. KATE goes to door C to see who it is, then turns and comes back. After a moment, BURRELLS enters C. He is a little man about forty. He wears old-fashioned gold-rimmed spectacles which look as though they have grown into his face. His hair is thin, but carefully distributed. He comes in looking terribly worried, followed by JUDITH.

BURRELLS (*seeing KATE, bitterly*) You would be here, of course, Miss Grant!

KATE (*quietly*). It might have been better, Mr. Burrells, for all concerned, if I'd been here a great deal more. Or if you and other people had condescended to listen to me a great deal more.

BURRELLS You insisted on pushing your nose in where it wasn't wanted, and as Billeting Officer——

KATE As Billeting Officer I think you've been woefully lacking in a real sense of duty.

BURRELLS (*furiously—to JUDITH*) You're my witness, Mrs. Drave, if I bring a suit for slander——

Heavy footsteps on the stairs.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

JUDITH That's the Inspector and the doctor coming down

BURRELLS I'll have a word with them (*Goes off C closing door*)

KATE (*bitterly*) Suit for slander! I hope he'll bring it!

JUDITH He'd never dare! There's too much dirty linen lying about

Re-enter BURRELLS, followed by INSPECTOR WILLIS, a big man whose kindly expression does not mask the shrewdness of his eyes

BURRELLS (*officially*) You've already seen Mrs. Drave, Inspector

INSPECTOR Yes (*Indicating KATE*) And this lady?

BURRELLS Miss Grant She has nothing to do with the case

INSPECTOR Then I shan't be wanting you, Madam

KATE But I'm very much part of the story, Inspector There are certain facts——

BURRELLS They are altogether irrelevant to what has happened!

INSPECTOR (*after a quick look from one to the other*) That remains to be seen (*Taking out his notebook*) Who exactly was in the house last night?

BURRELLS The children should be able to tell you that.

INSPECTOR They are all evacuees?

BURRELLS Yes

INSPECTOR (*referring to his notebook*) The name of the—of the woman who kept this house was Voray—Mrs Voray?

BURRELLS Yes, Inspector

INSPECTOR (*to JUDITH*) And you're Mrs Judith Drave, a teacher at Westnall Road . . ?

JUDITH Yes, Inspector Two of these children are in my class, which explains how I come to be here

INSPECTOR: Yes, I've got that And what brought *you* here, Miss Grant?

KATE I was passing the house and Mrs Drave asked me to come in

INSPECTOR Did *you* go upstairs?

KATE No, I haven't been up I stayed down here with the children all the time Mrs Drave told me what—what she had found

INSPECTOR (*to JUDITH*) You didn't touch anything?

JUDITH No. Only so far as was necessary to—to——

INSPECTOR I see. Now I'll take the names of the children

NO ROOM AT THE INN

BURRELLS I can give you all the data, Inspector

INSPECTOR Thank you, Mr Burrells, I may ask for your assistance later. (*Pulls up a chair and seats himself in front of children*) Now then, my dears—nothing to be frightened about As a matter of fact I've got two nice little girls at home I just want you to give me your names, and perhaps answer one or two questions—see? All quite simple (*To NORMA*) Now then, my dear, you look as though you're the eldest—suppose we start off with *you*? What's *your* name?

NORMA Norma Smith

INSPECTOR (*wringing*) Both parents living?

NORMA Dad's a p o w

BURRELLS. Prisoner of war in Japan

NORMA. That's right And Mum's a dancer

INSPECTOR Been here long?

NORMA. Bin a vacuee all the war

INSPECTOR Been with Mrs Voray all the time?

NORMA. No Bin with her two years

INSPECTOR (*to LILY*) And what about *you*, young lady? What's *your* name?

LILY Lily Robbins I'm a London vacuee like Norma Come here about the same time, too

BURRELLS (*hastily*): I'll give you all the facts about that case later

INSPECTOR (*to IRENE*) And *you*, my dear?

IRENE Ireen Saunders Bin here two years all but a month.

INSPECTOR (*after a moment's thought*). Did your parents ever come to see you?

NORMA What—all this way?

INSPECTOR I see—yes

NORMA (*pointing to MARY*) Her dad come to see her once.

INSPECTOR. When was that?

MARY (*speaking with difficulty*) Daddy—Daddy came—

NORMA Back in the summer

INSPECTOR (*to MARY*). And what's *your* name?

MARY. Mary O'Rane

NORMA: Her dad's in the Merchant Navy. He's Irish and her mother's dead

NO ROOM AT THE INN

INSPECTOR (to MARY) And how long have you been here ?

MARY I've been at Westnall since the blitz Mummy brought me up here to be safe

INSPECTOR Been in this house all the time ?

MARY No, sir Only since—since Mummy died

BURRELLS I brought her here, Inspector (*Glaring at KATE*) And I take full responsibility

INSPECTOR Well, why not ?

KATE Mr Burrells may one day be a little less anxious to take full responsibility

BURRELLS Never! I've done my best, and my best hasn't been made any easier by having people interfering——

INSPECTOR If all that has any bearing on the case it will be gone into later Now for the little chap What's your name, sonnie ?

MARY Ronnie Chilbury.

INSPECTOR Let him speak for himself, my dear

MARY He can't He's frightened There's no one to look after him but me No one in the world!

NORMA He's a blitz orphan

INSPECTOR (to BURRELLS) · No relations ?

BURRELLS We haven't been able to trace any, so far

INSPECTOR Well, now, children, I want to ask you one or two questions about what happened here last night. I want you to tell me when you went to bed—who was here—everything and anything, see ? Just tell me everything you saw and heard

The children suddenly grow wooden again, and the INSPECTOR stares at them in surprise and suspicion

Come, now! Have all of you suddenly lost your tongues ? (*Pointing pencil at NORMA*) When did you see Mrs. Voray last ?

NORMA (*unwillingly*). Las' night

INSPECTOR : That would be—when you went to bed ?

NORMA 'S'right

INSPECTOR Anyone with her ? (*No answer*) Perhaps you didn't see them ? Just heard them, perhaps ? (*No answer*) Come now, you don't want me to get cross with you, do you ?

The CHILDREN all stare up at him under their brows He turns round and surveys the supper table, then turns back and looks at the children

NO ROOM AT THE INN

INSPECTOR (*very quietly*) Do you know what has happened to Mrs Voray ?

With a low whimper RONNIE flings himself upon MARY, who swiftly folds him in a close embrace

(*Holding out his arms*) Come here, old chap—come here! I won't hurt you

Against the boy's will he takes RONNIE from MARY and holds him in parental fashion between his knees

I wouldn't hurt you for the world, sonnie I only want to find out what happened, see ? (*Looking at the girls*) And it seems to me you wouldn't all be so funny and quiet if you didn't know something (*Leaning forward and watching them intently*) Do you know what happened to Mrs Voray ?

Lights begin to fade

Do you ? Do you ?

His voice seems to echo round the room as the Lights fade out completely

END OF PROLOGUE

NO ROOM AT THE INN

Act One : Scene I

SCENE *The same, late afternoon in the previous September*
The sideboard looks almost tidy The table C is now covered by a ball-fringed cloth The grate is hidden behind a huge fan of faded coloured paper The window is open at the bottom, but the street is hidden by the lace curtains, which remain in position, swaying gently in the light breeze
NORMA, LILY, IRENE and RONNIE are standing L with their hands hanging limply above their heads Their arms sag, and suddenly NORMA shouts

NORMA All right—blast yer! I took yer bleeding tuppence

MRS VORAY *appears in doorway R She is about forty, and her black hair, lately "permed", hangs in curls about her shoulders, making her look rather older than she wishes to appear Her face is clumsily made-up. She is fond of glassy-looking satin blouses in crude colours At the moment, her attempt to look "dressy" is spoilt by a dirty old apron A cigarette hangs from her lips*

VORAY Ah! So you stole the tuppence, young Norm! Might 'a guessed it

NORMA Bought a bun I was hungry

VORAY Greedy, more like! Well, I know what to do with you, me lady

A car door slams.

NORMA Just you 'it me, dear! Just you 'it me! (*Nodding towards window*) Here's the old Billeting Officer coming in!

VORAY (*angrily*) Wot's 'e come for? Now then, you! Enjoy yerselves, you little *dee-ars*! Jump about, can't yer?

With a mournful hilarity the children start to jump about
Call that enjoyin' yerselves? Oppin' about like fleas on a not plate?
Laugh! Sing!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

*Hurries off C and can be seen removing her apron and preening herself
in the mirror of hall-stand
Double knock at front door*

RONNIE P'raps he's come to take us away!

NORMA • Yah! You bet!

VORAY (*at door C hissing*) Laugh! Sing! Or I'll give yer wot for!

NORMA sings, joined feebly by the others

NORMA • "Cold meat, mutton pies!

Tell me when yer mother dies

I'll come and bury 'er

Cold meat, mutton pies!"

During this VORAY passes out of sight to front door

At end of song NORMA seizes a cushion from couch and throws it at

RONNIE LILY picks it up and hurls it back RONNIE, with an excited
scream, seizes another cushion and the fight is "on" Voices off

*Then MR BURRELLS appears in doorway C, and a cushion, thrown
by NORMA, hits him full in the face*

BURRELLS (*annoyed*) Oh, here I say!

MRS VORAY re-enters

VORAY (*like a cooing dove*) Qui-ert, children! Qui-ert!

Instantly the children stop

(*With a humorous sigh*) They does like to 'ave a bit of a rowdy, Mr
Burrells! And I do so like to see them enjoying their little selves
Though I can't say it's good for me furniture (*This very pointedly*)

BURRELLS: No—er—I'm afraid it isn't (*Hastily.*) It's very good
of you to put up with them, Mrs Voray I'm sure they ought to be
grateful to you for giving them such a happy home There aren't
many who'd do as much, children—I can tell you that!

VORAY D'yer 'ear that, children? Well now, you go out and play
till yer supper's ready

*Like prisoners set free, the children dash out of the house Front
door slams*

BURRELLS Well! Thank God there are women like *you* in the world,
Mrs. Voray! And that brings me to the reason for my visit Could
you possibly take in another child—a girl about thirteen?

VORAY • M'm! Now you're asking!

BURRELLS: Yes, I am, I'm afraid.

VORAY; Take a chair, will yer?

BURRELLS sits L C

NO ROOM AT THE INN

This wants thinking about, I must say Who is the girl? A vacuee?

BURRELLS Yes She's been staying in rooms with her mother The mother died yesterday

VORAY And the people of the 'ouse don't want to keep the kid?

BURRELLS Well, you know how it is at this time of the year People can let anything in the shape of a bed even—let alone a room Holiday-makers will put up with anything, and pay through the nose for it

VORAY Hasn't the kid got no father?

BURRELLS Oh, yes He's at sea Merchant Navy

VORAY But ain't there no relations who'll take 'er?

BURRELLS The child doesn't know of any No papers to give any clue, either I gather the mother married beneath her She was a very superior person, the landlady says The father's a good-looking chap, but altogether different, she says, and putting two and two together she thinks the family shut the door on them when they married, because no letters ever came for Mrs O'Rane except from her husband.

VORAY O'Rane? Irish?

BURRELLS The father's Irish The mother came from London, though the landlady doesn't think she was a Londoner.

VORAY Oh! I see! Well—I don't feel like taking the girl I reely don't, I tell yer straight

BURRELLS Oh, I say! That *does* put me in a hole! Couldn't I—can't I persuade you to change your mind?

VORAY No You see—these kids I got 'ere—you know what they're like.

BURRELLS A bit on the rough side? Yes—I see what you mean

VORAY If this girl's mother was superior—oh, she'd only be finding fault with everything, and I won't stand for that

BURRELLS But I think she'd be only too grateful to you for taking her in I must confess I've already tried three other places

VORAY Didn't think my place was good enough for her, eh?

BURRELLS (*hastily*) Not at all! I knew you'd make her comfortable and all that But—well, you're pretty full already, aren't you?

VORAY No Mr Burrells, you didn't think as I was good enough for this 'ere young lady And as far as I'm concerned, that settles the matter

BURRELLS Oh, please, Mrs. Voray, don't look at it like that! But you *are* practically full up with the other children, aren't you?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY And I suppose the others you tried are full up with summer visitors ?

BURRELLS That's about the size of it So I must just throw myself on your tender mercy For the moment we can't touch the mother's money, of course, but I can promise you that the financial arrangements will be satisfactory

VORAY Well, I ain't doing this sort of thing for love!

BURRELLS Of course not! No one could expect it of you Look here—the child is outside in the car Will you let me bring her in ? I'm sure you'll like her when you see her Even if you only take her for a day or so, while I make other enquiries Not that there's much hope, I'm afraid

VORAY • You know damn well there isn't All right! Bring her in

BURRELLS Thanks very much I'm most awfully grateful to you
BURRELLS *hurries out of the room, leaving the door open Front door is heard to open, then car door MRS VORAY steps quickly to window and peeps out, then turns and seats herself on couch R C*

BURRELLS (off) Come along, my dear! I want you to meet Mrs Voray

Enter MARY O'RANE, followed by BURRELLS, who is carrying her suitcase MARY is a very different person from the child of the Prologue She looks not only clean, but smart She is wearing a light blue coat, and her beret is perched at a jaunty angle upon her smooth head But her eyes are red with recent weeping

BURRELLS Mrs Voray, this is Mary O'Rane.

VORAY (*trying to conceal her dislike*) Oh—quite the little lady, ain't she ?

BURRELLS She's been very well brought up, Mrs Voray, and I'm sure she'll give you no trouble—will you, Mary ?

MARY (*uncertainly*) Oh no, Mr Burrells

VORAY What school d'yer go to ?

MARY Westnall Road

VORAY • Oh, the Council School!

MARY Yes Mummy hoped I'd win a scholarship.

VORAY (*sniffing*) • Thought you was clever, I suppose ? Well, most mothers thinks their geese are swans, don't they, Mr. Burrells ?

BURRELLS • Yes, I suppose they do But Mary really *is* clever, I believe.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY (*briskly*) Well now, me dear, if I *do* take yer in and give yer an 'ome, I'll have to put meself out a good deal, I don't mind tellin' yer

MARY (*with a note of relief*) Oh—then perhaps we'd better try somewhere else, Mr Burrells ?

BURRELLS I'm afraid there's nowhere else to try, my dear

VORAY You don't want to stay 'ere—is that it ?

MARY (*politely*) Not if it would put you out

VORAY Never you mind about that! Do yer want to come to me or don'cher ?

BURRELLS *looks worried*

MARY (*desolately*) If there's nowhere else for me to—to go——

VORAY (*rising*) Very well, then Now mind, me dear, I shall do me best—Mr Burrells knows that But per'aps it won't be exactly wot yer used to (*Her tone and glance indicating that this is as much for Burrells as for Mary*) If it isn't—well, I'm not going to have you runnin' round sayin' my 'ouse is that and this, and the other kids are this and that—see wot I mean ?

BURRELLS (*hastily*) Why, of course not! I'm sure you're only too grateful to Mrs Voray for taking you, aren't you, Mary ?

MARY Oh, yes. Thank you

BURRELLS. That's right, my dear Well, then, I'll leave her with you, Mrs. Voray I'll call round in a day or two to see how you are getting along

Patting MARY on the shoulder

Good-bye, my dear Keep your pecker up. Good-bye.

BURRELLS goes out, followed by MRS VORAY They can be heard talking together in the passage for a moment Then the front door slams, then the car door MARY has been looking about her like a trapped animal, but after the car moves away, she suddenly grows tense, awaiting the coming of MRS VORAY—the delay in her re-appearance adding to her fear. She looks quickly towards the window as though seeking a way of escape, then suddenly jumps as, without warning, she hears MRS VORAY'S voice from the doorway

VORAY So nobody would take yer, eh ? Nobody but me! (*Coming further in and looking MARY up and down*) Well, well, well!

Taking MARY'S sleeve between finger and thumb

That's a nice coat you got, duckie!

MARY: Mum—Mummy made it out of one of hers

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY Ah! Didn't look like utility stuff to me Yes—very nice
But I can't let yer wear that coat, ducks Wouldn't be fair on the other
kids

MARY Oh, but I *must* wear it! It's my best coat

VORAY I dessay But it wouldn't be fair on the others—you with
a nice coat like that Make 'em jealous No—I don't think as I can
let you wear that coat

*MARY'S hands clench themselves to her breast, as though she will suffer
physical violence rather than the coat should be taken from her, but
at that moment there is a double knock at the front door MRS VORAY
goes to window and peeps out, then turns with her lower lip thrust
out in angry question The double knock is repeated and she goes out
to answer it MARY goes to sofa and sits crouching in the corner*

VORAY (off) Yes ²

JUDITH (off) Good evening Are you Mrs Voray ²

VORAY Yes

JUDITH May I come in for a moment ² I'm from the school

VORAY Oh! All right You can come in

*Front door is heard to close, and JUDITH appears in the passage,
looking uncertain of her direction*

JUDITH enters, followed by VORAY

JUDITH (*as she enters*) Oh, thank you. As I said, I'm from the
school, and Norma Smith is in my class (*Suddenly seeing MARY*) Why,
Mary! What are *you* doing here ²

VORAY Her mother's dead

JUDITH Oh, *Mary*!

VORAY Yes And no one would take the kid in but *me*

JUDITH glances with regret round the room

JUDITH Oh! Oh, dear!

VORAY And what's wrong with the kid being 'ere ²

JUDITH (*hastily*) Oh, nothing! The Billeting Officer brought her
here, I suppose ²

VORAY Begged me to take 'er in!

JUDITH Well—I suppose he knows best But, Mary, I am most
terribly sorry to hear about—about your mother When—when did it
happen?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

MARY'S eyes are almost shouting an appeal for help

When did it happen, Mary?

MARY Yesterday Yesterday morning That's why I couldn't come to school, Mrs Drave

JUDITH No, of course not! We'll have a little talk presently, shall we?

MARY Oh, yes—*please!*

JUDITH (*coming down to VORAY, taking a note from her bag*) I've brought this note for you, Mrs Voray, from the headmistress.

JUDITH *hands note to VORAY, who opens it and reads, then with a great effort to control her temper, looks at JUDITH*

VORAY Ha! (*Snuffs*) Now that's wot I call hodd—very hodd indeed! I was coming round to the 'eadmistress to speak about that very thing

JUDITH (*after a quick look*) So that's your attitude? Like certain famous generals, you apparently think that the best defensive is to take the offensive

VORAY (*belligerently*): Are you incinerating that I'm offensive?

JUDITH You miss my point

VORAY Ho no! I got yer point all right You're trying to say that the children from this 'ouse are dirty

JUDITH The facts speak for themselves.

VORAY I works me fingers to the bone trying—trying, mind you!—to keep them kids neat and clean But if kids are brought up as young 'ooligans, you don't turn 'em into angels by evacuating 'em

JUDITH They may be rough in their behaviour, but it is up to *you* to see that they are *clean*

VORAY Gawd gi'me patience! Wot jer take this place for—a cleech?

JUDITH What time do the children leave the house in the morning?

VORAY In time to get to school pungshal.

JUDITH Then why do they arrive looking so dirty? If they started out clean——

VORAY Got any kids of your own?

JUDITH No

VORAY Thought not Well, you can't tell *me* much about children I've buried three of me own.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

JUDITH. Doesn't suggest you've been very much of a success As a teacher——

VORAY As a teacher, *you* only see kids at their best

JUDITH (*scoffing*) You're telling me

VORAY. Well—I'll be comin' round to see the 'eadmistress meself tomorrer. I *did* notice things about young Norma, and I was coming round to make a complaint

JUDITH Make a complaint?

VORAY. That sort of thing didn't come from *this* 'ouse Give yer my word!

JUDITH Well, if you can't—or won't—put the matter right, then we must take steps ourselves It must not go on a day longer than we can help And now may I speak to Mary for a moment?

VORAY Why?

JUDITH Mary's in my class, and I think we are friends

VORAY. Lot of good *your* friendship's done 'er!

JUDITH Friendship can't be measured by what one is not able to do

VORAY You think this place isn't good enough for the kid All right, then! Take her away! *You* give her an 'ome

JUDITH I wish I could But I've only a small room in a hostel

VORAY Well, there it is! If you're not willing to take the kid, then I tell yer straight out—I'll stand no interference from the likes of *you*

JUDITH (*taking her measure, recognising blackmail*) I quite understand And now, will you be good enough to let me have a moment alone with Mary?

VORAY. All right

She goes out, shutting the door
During the last exchanges MARY's face has brightened with hope and then fallen again, as she realises the hope was without foundation
JUDITH turns to her perplexedly

JUDITH Mary dear——

MARY (*swallowing with difficulty*) Yes, Mrs. Drave?

JUDITH I—I don't really know what to say to you, chicken It isn't too nice here, is it?

MARY: I—I think it's dreadful!

JUDITH. Well—well, perhaps not quite so bad as that But it's not what you've been used to Look here! Try and stick it out for a day or two, will you? Meantime I'll ask all round—get into touch with

NO ROOM AT THE INN

some of the mothers and see if one of them will take you in Daddy's away at sea, isn't he ?

MARY Yes, Mrs Drave

JUDITH Know when he'll be back ?

MARY No No, I don't

JUDITH But he might come back any day, mightn't he ?

MARY Yes!

JUDITH That's something to look forward to, isn't it ?

MARY Yes

JUDITH Well, then, I'll be trying everywhere to find a nice home for you, and there's the chance of your father coming home—why, perhaps tomorrow or the day after!—so stick it here for a bit, will you ? Do your best to stick it for a bit

MARY I—I'll try, Mrs Drave But—I do miss my Mummy so!

JUDITH You *must* do, poor child!

MARY She's been dead such a long time. (*Stretches out her hand and looks at her wrist-watch, which is much too loose for her*) Twenty-nine hours and three quarters!

JUDITH That Mummy's watch ?

MARY Yes

JUDITH The strap's a bit loose. Let me alter it for you

MARY *takes off wrist-watch and JUDITH adjusts the strap*
You must take great care of this And keep it always

MARY Oh yes, Mrs Drave !

JUDITH (*handing back watch*) There you are, my dear

MARY *puts watch on again*

I think you're splendid, not to cry.

MARY I cried so much yesterday, I don't think I've got any water left in me.

JUDITH Well, try not to cry any more, darling Things are never as bad as they seem

MARY (*surprised*). But Mummy's dead!

JUDITH Oh, Mary, I didn't mean that! What a stupid thing for me to say! What I really meant was—you not having a home. Something will turn up, I feel sure. Feel like coming to school tomorrow ?

MARY I—I don't know

NO ROOM AT THE INN

JUDITH It might help

MARY But when I come out of school I—I'd have to come back here!

JUDITH Only for a little while But in school—you and I will have a secret You'll be saying to me "I'm sticking it out! I'm being brave!" And I'll be saying to you "I know you're being brave, Mary!" So try and come, will you?

MARY Yes I'll try

JUDITH That's the ticket Well, I must be getting along

Stoops quickly and kisses MARY

Good night, Mary.

MARY Good night, Mrs Drave

JUDITH, *with a worried backward look at MARY, goes out, closing the door*

Muffled voices off MARY gives a despairing look towards door as though praying for some miracle to happen Suddenly she jumps as MRS VORAY is heard screaming off

VORAY (*off*) Norma! Norma! Just you come in I want cher
Footsteps along passage, then MRS VORAY re-enters She looks at MARY for a moment, then suddenly smiles. MARY, taken by surprise, gives a wintry gleam of a smile in response

VORAY Them teachers! Interfering lot, ain't they, duckie?

MARY Oh! Mrs Drave is—very nice

VORAY May be But she's not putting herself out for yer, that's clear Me—I'm the only one that's got a grain of decency I'm the only one as 'ave taken yer in, ain't I?

MARY Yes, Mrs—Mrs——

VORAY Voray A gentleman once told me it was French Not that my 'usband's French, though 'e took French leaf of me, the blackguard!

MARY Oh—I'm sorry!

VORAY Yers I've 'ad me troubles, I can tell yer

MARY I—I'm sorry

VORAY I 'opes as you won't be a trouble to me, 'cos I couldn't stand for it See? Yer got to keep yer trap shut If yer *don't*, I'll learn yer. Looks to me as if I'll 'ave to keep yer on the billeting allowance, and if yer don't keep on me right side that means starvation.

MARY But—but Mummy had money!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY The Lor 'ave taken that, and Mr Burrells says we got to 'ave power-of-a-turkey Power-of-a-turkey! Lotter red tape! So you got to say to yourself "Beggars can't be choosers!" See? So you'll 'ave to 'elp with the 'ousework and—*keep yer trap shut* Get my meaning?

MARY (*terrified*) Oh—yes I think so

VORAY That's right, duckie I thinks we understand each other

Voice of MRS WATERS off, in passage

WATERS (*off*) Can I come in, Mrs V?

VORAY (*in a very friendly fashion*) Oh, come right in, Mrs Waters

Enter MRS WATERS, a fat, sluttish woman about fifty

WATERS Bin 'avin' some visitors, 'aven't yer? (*Looking round the door, sees MARY*) Takin' 'er in, are yer?

VORAY Yers She's another little bit of Gawdelpus All come to me, don't they?

WATERS I'll say they do! Yers (*Out of the corner of her mouth*) Ow's that for our arrangement for tonight, dear?

VORAY Well, that's all right. They can 'ave the bedroom same as usual

WATERS Be a bit of a squeeze, won't it? I mean to say—you can put four kids in a bed, but not five

VORAY And who says I can't? It's only for one night, when all's said

WATERS Well, you knows yer own business best, of course

VORAY I'll say I do! And if I'm expected to take kids in for next to nothing, the kids can't complain if they don't sleep ritzy

WATERS: No, they can't, can they? (*Looking at MARY*) So that's 'ow it is, eh? Wouldn't think it, would yer? Well, dear, I *was* wonderin'—this young couple comin' reg'lar every week and payin' up nicely—Don't want to turn 'em away, do we?

VORAY 'Oo'se turnin' of 'em away? Not *me!* They can come to-night same as usual, and next week, and every blessed other week It won't be me as says "No" to their money And why should I?

WATERS Ha! I'll get me rake-off same as usual?

VORAY Every time this couple comes you asks me the same question! Don't yer trust me?

WATERS I'd trust yer with anythink in the world, barring a bottle of whisky

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY Don't you worry! You'll get your half-a-crown as soon as they've paid up in the morning (*Laughs*) They must think it's worth it! (*Indicating MARY with her head*) Come into the scullery I got something to tell yer

Laughing suggestively, she goes off R followed by MRS WATERS, giggling in anticipation The door is shut sharply The horrible thing behind this mysterious conversation has seeped through MARY's innocence, warning her that there is more evil in the house than she expected She rises, picks up her suitcase, and is going to door when the voices of the other children are heard in the passage, and suddenly they are all staring at her from the doorway C

LILY Who are you?

NORMA I know who she is It's Mary O'Rane She's in my class at school Stuck-up bit of goods? I'll say! Wouldn't never sit next to me if she could help it

IRENE Well, what's she doing here?

LILY Ain't been billeted here, has she?

NORMA (*to MARY*) Have yer?

MARY Yes But I'm going away again

IRENE Where to, dearie?

MARY If you *must* know I—I'm going to friends

NORMA Sending the car for yer, are they? And a footman to carry your suet-case!

LILY Oh, shut up, Norm! Can't yer see she's been crying? What's the matter?

MARY Mum—my mother died yesterday, and I don't want to stay in this house I don't want to stay here.

LILY Nor don't *we*, give yer my word!

MARY (*surrendering her pride*) There—there's nowhere else to go. No one will take me in

RONNIE (*going to her*) I'm Ronnie

LILY He's a blitz orphan

MARY (*turning to him with a sympathetic smile*) Oh—I'm sorry!

RONNIE *shyly holds out his hand to MARY, who takes it in hers (Finding at last a crumb of comfort.)* We'll be friends, won't we?

RONNIE *nods*

(*Suddenly*) You say you don't like it here, and I won't stay Let's—

NO ROOM AT THE INN

let's all walk out Let's go out into the street—march along and shout •
“We want decent homes! We want decent homes!”

The girls stare at her unmoved

NORMA Oh, we can't grumble about the place 'Tisn't so bad

LILY • Oh no, we don't complain about the house

MARY Then why don't you like it here?

NORMA (*scratching her head*) Seen the old girl?

MARY Yes I'm afraid of her

IRENE Nothing to what you will be, ducks

MARY Does she—hit you?

LILY Oh no! She don't *hit* you—not so's anyone 'ud notice

IRENE Last week she shut Ronnie up in the coal-cellar all night

RONNIE *suddenly clenches his fists and gives a whimper like an animal*

MARY (*aghast*) In the coal-cellar? I—I'd scream the place down!

NORMA He *can't* scream, poor little beggar! Just goes dead with fright

MARY Oh! Had you been *very* naughty, Ronnie?

RONNIE I wanted my mum, and I kept crying

MARY How *dreadful*! Oh, let's all go away from here! There's five of us They'd have to take notice of five of us!

NORMA • They'd only send us back here, or shut us up in the police-station Oh, what's the good? (*Suddenly starts to dance*) My mum's a dancer I'm going to be a dancer, too, one day Dance right up on me toes.

MARY But I think if we all stood together and marched out——

NORMA (*shaking her head as she begins a rather unsteady arabesque*). No damn good, dearies—it wouldn't be no use (*Dropping her foot to the floor*) Well, perhaps you won't be so stuck-up now, Mary O'Rane. Wouldn't sit next me in school 'cos you thought I was dirty, and now you'll have to sleep next me in bed!

Enter MRS. VORAY R with a piece of newspaper and a small-tooth comb in her hand

VORAY Norma! They've sent a complaint from the school Just you get busy with your head!

Flings comb and newspaper on table, then goes out.

NORMA, *without shame, seats herself on sofa and begins to comb her hair over the newspaper, showing a certain amount of interest in the*

NO ROOM AT THE INN

result MARY watches her with growing horror, then suddenly she drops her suitcase and turning, flings herself face downwards into armchair
L C Her body shakes convulsively, but she makes no sound RONNIE puts out his hand and touches her on the shoulder

END OF SCENE ONE

Act One : Scene 2

SCENE *The same One Saturday evening a fortnight later The window is wide open, the curtains moving a little in the evening breeze*
KATE GRANT is being shown in by MRS VORAY

KATE (*as she enters*) so glad if I could see her for a moment

VORAY Well, she's out playin' with my others

KATE Oh, you have children of your own ? That's good

VORAY Good enough They're all dead

KATE *gasps*

I was referring to my other vacuees

KATE Well, I'm glad Mary has some playmates I was afraid she would grieve She was so devoted to her mother What had I better do ? I can't stop long Perhaps I might find her somewhere ?

MRS VORAY *hesitates, then goes to window, and diving under curtain, calls raucously*

VORAY · Ireen! Hi-reen! Find Mary and tell 'er there's someone askin' for 'er Quick, now! (*Turns back into the room*)

KATE And how many evacuees have you got, Mrs Voray ?

VORAY Five altogether

KATE Isn't this rather a small house for so many children ?

VORAY Large enough. Two double rooms and one single

KATE They're all girls, I suppose ?

VORAY Four girls and a boy

KATE And the boy sleeps in the single room ? Or does he sleep with *you* ?

VORAY: I 'ave to 'ave a room to meself. I enjoy very bad 'ealth.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

KATE You don't— Please forgive my asking! But you don't take in any visitors, do you?

VORAY Fat lotter room I got for visitors, and fat lotter time neither!

KATE No, no, of course not! Well, then, the children aren't too crowded, are they?

VORAY (*after a moment, her tone hardening*) You'll excuse me, Mrs——

KATE Miss Grant

VORAY Ah—Miss Grant Well, Miss Grant, have you any authority for askin' all these questions?

KATE Oh, no Please don't misunderstand me I'm just a friend of Mary's—that's all

VORAY So that's all, is it? Live 'ere?

KATE We came here in forty-one We were bombed out

VORAY And where are yer stayin'?

KATE By the Common We're in rooms—or rather, one room and a half My mother and I have a bedroom, and we share the sitting-room with other lodgers I do our cooking, and more than our share of the housework I'm not grumbling I'm only too thankful we're in a safe place But sharing rooms isn't good for my mother She's an invalid

VORAY Well, the place is very full The Billeting Officer begged me on his bended knees to take Mary

KATE Very good of you!

VORAY Yers It's really too much for one pair of 'ands and feet to look after five children

KATE I'm sure it must mean a lot of work.

Running footsteps along the passage, then MARY enters quickly and looks at KATE with shining eyes. KATE is a little shocked, for it is a very different Mary from Scene I. She is not only untidy, but looks distinctly uncared for

VORAY (*pointedly*) Bin enjoyin' yerself, ducks?

Ignoring MRS VORAY, MARY crosses to KATE.

MARY (*in tremulous joy*) They said someone was asking for me I—I couldn't believe it

VORAY Well, I'll leave you two together, then

MRS. VORAY *goes out C shutting the door so quietly that it doesn't quite catch KATE, kissing MARY, is not aware of this.*

NO ROOM AT THE INN

KATE It is nice to see you again, my dear Let's sit down, shall we? (*Sits in armchair L C, drawing up a smaller chair beside her*)

MARY, *after a quick, furtive look at door, sits*

My dear, I didn't know about your—sad loss I was so terribly sorry when I heard Mother's been ill, and I've been very much tied, so I really didn't notice that I hadn't seen you for some days Then, when enquired after you, the people told me you were in good hands, so I didn't worry about you But mother's better now, so I thought I'd come and look up my little friend

MARY (*her enthusiasm drained away because of her uncertainty about the door*) Thank you, Miss Grant

KATE It is nice to know they've found a good home for you, with nice playmates

MARY (*tonelessly*) Yes, Miss Grant

Door opens slightly—a fact of which MARY is immediately conscious, but KATE doesn't notice it

KATE I was wondering if we couldn't have a little treat Go to the pictures, perhaps—or take the bus to Westnall Sands

MARY (*tonelessly*) Thank you, Miss Grant

KATE (*hurt*) But perhaps you'd rather play with your friends? (*Suddenly struck by MARY's odd manner*) Mary! You're all right here, aren't you?

MARY (*after a swift glance towards door—exactly like a parrot*) Oh yes, Miss Grant, I'm ever so happy here. I'm ever so happy here

KATE stares at her in amazement, then her eye is caught by a gentle movement of the door She hesitates for a moment, then with set lips she rises, goes up and shuts door firmly, then returns

KATE Mary, I think you're lying to me

MARY Oh no, Miss Grant I'm very happy here—ever so happy

KATE (*dropping her hand on MARY's shoulder*) You are lying, my dear I know it. Look here—come out for a walk with me, will you?

MARY No, thank you

KATE Mary!

MARY You'll only make me say things, and then I'll get into a worse She told me to shut me trap.

KATE "Shut your trap"! That's not a very nice expression I'm surprised—coming from you!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

MARY (*tonelessly*) Let me alone then! I'm ever so happy here—ever so happy

KATE Oh God, that's a lie! You're not telling me the truth, Mary!

MARY *merely looks sullen and KATE gazes at her in desperation*

KATE (*at length*) What is the name of your teacher at school?

MARY Mrs Drave But she doesn't come any more

KATE Left, has she?

MARY (*shying away from the subject*) I don't know I think she's ill

KATE Do you know where she lives?

MARY (*shaking her head*) • She comes by the bus

KATE Well, I must have a talk with her some time. Is your father likely to be back soon?

MARY *closes her eyes, and for a moment it looks as if she may burst into tears Then she opens her eyes and speaks for the first time in her natural voice*

MARY He may come back any time—any day!

KATE Oh, I do hope he'll come soon

MARY Yes—so do I!

KATE Sure you won't come for a walk with me?

MARY (*after a slight hesitation*) • No, thank you, Miss Grant

KATE Well, if you want me, you know where to find me, don't you?

MARY Yes, Miss Grant

KATE Would you like me to come and see you again some time?

MARY *doesn't answer, and after waiting for a moment KATE repeats softly*

You know where to find me Good-bye, Mary!

MARY Good-bye, Miss Grant

KATE *goes to door, hesitates as though she feels something is still unsaid, then turns quickly and goes out. After a moment the front door is heard to close Then door C is softly opened and RONNIE slips in*

RONNIE Did the lady come to take you away, Mary?

MARY No, she never said anything about that Ronnie, tell you what—my dad'll be back any day now. He's been gone a long time. He might even come while we're asleep!

RONNIE • Then he'll take you away!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

MARY Listen, silly! When my dad comes home I shouldn't think he'll go to sea again Where there's children to look after they always say "The children must come first"

RONNIE (*doubtfully*). Do they?

MARY Yes So when my dad's home again and finds I'm a motherless child the Government will stop him from going to sea again

RONNIE Does the Gumnent know about your mum?

MARY The Government's like God—it knows everything

RONNIE Does it know about us being *here*?

MARY Well, at the moment the Government's rather busy—winning the war. But the Government will do anything for the Merchant Navy, so when dad goes there and says "Please can I stop at home and look after my child?" the Government will say "That's O K by *me*!"

RONNIE Coo!

MARY Then daddy and I will have a home, and you shall come and live with us always

RONNIE Always and always?

MARY (*wetting her finger*) See that's wet? (*Dries finger*) See that's dry? (*Draws finger across her throat*) Amen!

Girls' voices in the passage, then they enter NORMA immediately begins opening drawers in sideboard

NORMA Old Mother Voray's gone shopping Wish I knew where she keeps our sweet coup'ns

LILY: Can't get sweets just on coup'ns.

NORMA Fancy that, now! I'll say you're bright! I got some money, see?

IRENE How did yer get it?

NORMA (*innocently*) An old lady dropped her bag as she was getting out of the bus, and all her money fell out I helped her pick it up

LILY Did she give yer anything?

NORMA: I think she forgot, so I kep' a bob back for me trouble

MARY. But that's stealing!

NORMA: Findings is keepings, ain't it? Where's them sweet coup'ns? She keeps the ration books in here, I know, but *where's* the sweet coup'ns?

MARY: My mummy always said "coupons".

NORMA (*with derisive refinement*) Coupoungs? And didn't no one laugh? (*With natural scorn*) Coupoungs! Wish I could lay me 'and

NO ROOM AT THE INN

on a blasted coupong! (*Glancing out of window*) There's old Charlie! (*Dives under curtain and shouts*) Hi, Charlie! Have yer got such a thing as a sweet coupong? (*Shouts with laughter*) Yah! (*Lifts curtain to speak into the room*) Old Charlie don't know what I'm talking about (*Dives under curtain again, then lifts it to say*) Someone stopping at our door It's a man

Double knock

(*Putting her head outside again*) Excuse me! Is there anythink you're wanting?

O'RAHE (*off*) Does Mary O'Rand live here, darlint?

NORMA Yes! (*Excitedly, as she comes from under curtain*) Mary! I believe it's yer dad!

For a moment MARY is held speechless with excitement Then in a flash she is out of the room and into the passage, and the front door is heard to open

MARY (*off*) Daddy, Daddy! Oh, Daddy, Daddy!

O'RAHE (*off*) My darlint! Me darlint! So I've found yer at last!

MARY (*off*) Come in, Daddy! Come in!

Front door slams, and O'RAHE is seen in the passage. He is about thirty-five, handsome, but betrayed by a weak chin He carries a battered-looking bag MARY slips under his arm and re-enters |
(*Proudly and joyfully*) It's my dad!

O'RAHE (*looking round at the children with a smile*) So these are your little chums, are they?

MARY pulls forward a very shy RONNIE

MARY This is Ronnie!

O'RAHE So that's Ronnie!

NORMA I'm Norma

LILY I'm Lily.

IRENE I'm Ireen

O'RAHE And I'm Terence. Terence O'Rand. Will yer be after asking me to sit down, and I fit to drop? For I've tramped the town, looking for Mary—I have that!

The girls push armchair forward

MARY: But didn't the Government tell you I was here, Daddy?

O'RAHE They did not! I called at your old lodgings and heard your dear Mother was—was—— (*Takes out a grimy handkerchief and blows*

NO ROOM AT THE INN

his nose more vigorously than is really necessary) Fair broke me heart,
t did, Mary Fair broke me poor heart!

MARY (*clinging to him*) I've got *you* now, Daddy! It won't be so
sad now *you've* come home

O'RANE . And would ye believe it ? The people at your old lodgings
pretended they didn't know where you'd gone Looked ashamed, I
thought And I was after telling them what I thought of them

MARY Oh, Daddy! What did you say to them ?

O'RANE It wasn't so much what I *said* But I gave them *wan look*.
And then a neighbour at her gate told me to try the Billeting Officer
And here I am, me darlint!

MARY (*nodding and taking RONNIE's hand*) Home for always, Daddy!

O'RANE No 'Tis only for a week-end

MARY . But you must tell the Government about me being a motherless
child, Daddy!

O'RANE But if I didn't go to sea, England would starve And that
would never do, would it, me darlints ?

RONNIE No, that would never do!

O'RANE . Spoken like a man, Robbie!

RONNIE (*hurt by being miscalled, correcting gently*) *Ronnie* !

MARY But, Daddy, we're homeless! No one will take us in

O'RANE Aren't you living here, then ?

MARY Yes, but——

O'RANE . Well, then—— ?

RONNIE It's—it's not nice here!

O'RANE Not nice here, Robbie ?

RONNIE (*politely*) *Ronnie*!

O'RANE It looks all right to *me*

IRENE . *You* haven't seen old Mother Voray!

O'RANE Would that be the lady that keeps the house ?

RONNIE (*clenching his fists*) I think she's the devil!

O'RANE . The devil, Robbie ?

RONNIE (*terribly hurt*): *Ronnie* !

MARY His name's *Ronnie*, Daddy, and he's a blitz orphan, and I've
promised he shall come and live with us always when you come home
from sea Will *you* promise, too ?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

O'RANE Of couise, darlint! When the war's over we'll have a fine home—a lovely home (*His tone changing to anger*) And I'm turning me backside on that ould sea for ever!

NORMA Don't you like going to sea, then?

O'RANE Ask any sailor if he likes going to sea, and he'll tell ye no, he hates it, and he'll go back the day after!

LILY Seen any U-boats?

O'RANE Have I *not*? Why, sometimes—— But there, I'm not a man to boast, but if I'd been in the Services I'd have won the V C six times over! One time our ship was torpedoed, and we took to the boats The sub came alongside——

Tense interest shown by all

and the Commander told us we must surrender or he'd sink the boat

NORMA In English?

O'RANE No, in German, but I grasped his meaning And I gave that Commander wan look, *wan look*—and instanter that U-boat submerged!

LILY. Why?

NORMA (*with ill-concealed scepticism*) Because he gave it *wan look*! Wish he'd give old Mother Voray *wan look* She might submerge down the dub!

O'RANE And are ye tellin' me she don't treat ye right?

MARY Oh, Daddy, please take Ronnie and me away!

O'RANE (*putting his arm about her*) Darlint, I ain't got a home—not yet. Some day soon, perhaps But can't they put you somewhere else?

MARY No one will take us But, oh Daddy, I can't stay here It's dreadful!

O'RANE Well, but the place doesn't look so bad to me 'Tis the old woman, I take it? Does she knock you about?

MARY (*unable to explain*). No, but—oh, Daddy, she frightens me!

O'RANE. Ha! I'll soon put the fear of God into her!

NORMA: You just give her one of your looks!

O'RANE I will that! I'll give the ould cat *wan*——

Enter MRS VORAY C O'RANE is plainly taken aback by the vision that confronts him instead of the dirty old woman of his fancy. Slowly he rises, unconscious that the children are all staring at him, waiting for him to bring his guns into action.

MARY (*defiantly*). This is my daddy!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

O'RANE (*politely*) Good afternoon, marm

MRS VORAY *crosses to him and gives him her hand at an affected angle*

VORAY Pleased to meet yer, I'm sure!

She gives a swift glance round at the children, then turns back to O'RANE, waiting to see what attitude he will adopt

O'RANE (*driven to speech by the strength of her silence*) I'm after telling them about the U-boats and that

VORAY That's right It'll teach the kids what they owes to brave men like you, Mr O'Rane! Or should I say "Captin"?

O'RANE (*trying to conceal his pleasure*) Ah, that's going a bit too far, marm

VORAY You *do* surprise me! Glad to see yer dad, Mary?

MARY (*prompting him*) Daddy!

VORAY It hasn't been easy for 'er, as p'raps you can guess, but she's been a brave girl—I'll say that for 'er! Some people might say as she didn't show much feeling, but ah, I knows better! You learn to keep yer feelin's to yerself, when people shuts the door in yer face and refuses to give yer an 'ome Mary will 'ave told yer as I was the only one as 'ud take 'er in, I s'pose?

O'RANE Well, she did say something like that Er—very good of you, I'm sure, marm

MARY • Daddy, *please*!

O'RANE *makes a gesture of impatience*

VORAY Sit down, won't yer? (*With a knowing look*) I got some-think in me scullery I know you'll like!

She goes out R leaving the door open O'RANE is suddenly conscious that the children are all looking at him in keen disappointment Thinking to raise himself in their estimation he thrusts his hand in his trousers pocket and brings out a coin

O'RANE Why, look what I've just found—half a dollar! And how much is half a dollar, Robbie?

RONNIE *turns away his head*

NORMA Two bob!

O'RANE There now! What about taking yer friends out and buying them some sweets, eh, Mary?

MARY *doesn't answer.*

VORAY (*off*). What's that I hear?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA, *with a swift movement, puts one hand on Mary's shoulder, and with the other seizes the coin from O'RANE*

NORMA (*loudly*) No, thank you, Mr O'Rane You see, we can't buy sweets without *coupangs*

O'RANE *is looking from his empty hand to NORMA in perplexity when MRS VORAY re-enters carrying a tray with two tumblers and a bottle of beer*

VORAY Run away and play out back, children Me and Mr O'Rane wants to have a teety-er-teety

NORMA, LILY and IRENE *go towards door R followed very slowly by*

RONNIE MARY *stands looking at her father accusingly*

O'RANE (*embarrassed by MARY's gaze*) Nice little chap, Robbie!

RONNIE *flashes him one look of pained dislike, then turns and dashes through the others and out of the room*

VORAY And what are *you* waitin' for, Mary?

MARY If you're going to talk to Daddy, I'm staying here!

VORAY I see! Mary doesn't want you to 'ear the truth, Mr O'Rane She knows wot I mean

MARY. That letter—it's *my* letter You'd no right to read it!

VORAY The Billeting Officer said as I got the rights of a parent over yer

O'RANE (*eyeing the beer and licking his lips*) I'd like a little talk with the lady, darlint Just to—straighten things out

MARY (*desperately*) You won't betray me, Daddy—will you?

O'RANE (*jovially, drawing her to him and kissing her*). Sure and I'll not bethray yer, me heart's darlint! I only wants to know as ye're in safe keepin' while yer poor Dad's rocked in the cradle of the deep Run along now, me dear

MARY: When will I come back, Daddy?

O'RANE Ar, in ten minuts or so.

MARY (*looking at her watch*) Five minutes, Daddy!

O'RANE. Foive it is, then

MARY *goes out R counting on her watch*

VORAY (*pouring beer*) That child oughtn't to 'ave 'er mother's watch She'll only break it. Don't you think as I'd better keep it for 'er?

Hands beer to O'RANE

O'RANE: You should that, marm Thanks!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY (*raising her glass*) · Well—'appy days, Jack—and nights!

O'RANE (*grinning*) My best respects, marm!

They drink

Ar! Just what I was needin'!

VORAY (*winking*) A little of wot yer fancies does yer good, eh
'Ow long a leaf 'ave yer got, Jack?

O'RANE Just the week-end

VORAY And where are yer stoppin'?

O'RANE Well, I thought to stop with me poor wife

VORAY Left it a bit late to fix up anythink else

O'RANE Why—is the place so full?

VORAY Full? You'll be on the tramp till midnight, and then come back and beg me to let yer turn up on me sofa

O'RANE And you lettin' me?

VORAY (*smirking*) You can try! (*With a sensual challenge*) All depends whether you promise to behave yerself, Jack I knows you sailors when you comes ashore!

O'RANE (*clearly not unwilling to meet the challenge*) Ar! And what might yer be askin' for bed and breakfast?

VORAY Don't you worry yer 'ead about that, Jack! Can't say *I'm* the graspin' kind I bin keepin' that kid of yours on the billeting allowance—seven bob a week! Couldn't touch her mother's money—lotter red tape But p'raps now *you* come home you'll be able to square things up.

O'RANE I will that! Ye're a kind-hearted woman, I can see that. And meantime I'll make the seven shillings up to a pound I'll put a sum of money in the Post Office in Mary's name, and she can draw it out each week

VORAY'S jaw drops

VORAY You'd trust that child with money? She'd take out the lot and spend it!

O'RANE Oh, Mary's a good girl.

VORAY You haven't seen much of her, that's clear! She's a wicked little liar.

O'RANE Oh, I could never believe that of her, marm!

VORAY Ah! But for me that child would be 'omeless, and what thanks do I get for it? Lies told about me be'ind me back! (*Taking letter from her bag.*) Mary was upset because I opened a letter from her

NO ROOM AT THE INN

school-teacher Good job I did! This woman speaks about me as though I was mud

O'RANE Does she now? I'd like to meet her! I'd give her *wan look* and she'd know what I thought of her

VORAY (*giving him letter*) Well, just you read this!

O'RANE (*reading*) "Mary dear, I have been thinking about you so much I got drenched tramping round trying to find you a nice home"

VORAY A nice home!

O'RANE "And now I am laid up with a feverish cold and rheumatism and all sorts of aches and pains But I give you my word I will get you out of that dreadful place as soon——"

VORAY Dreadful place! Now what does *she* know about my place? She only come 'ere once—to bring a friendly note from the 'eadmistress—and then she barely set foot inside the door It's Mary! She's been tellin' lies, see?

O'RANE (*handing back letter*) I can't understand it, marm

VORAY Call me 'Aggie', Jack

O'RANE Well, now, that's mighty friendly of ye—*Aggie*!

VORAY: I know I'm easy goin' and all that, and if yer stops 'ere for the week-end p'raps you'll think I'm a bit *too* easy goin'—yer wife being such a superior sort of woman——

O'RANE Ar, she *was* that Quite the lady.

VORAY (*after a quick look*) Bit difficult to live with, eh?

When O'RANE hesitates, with a laugh.

I bet you 'ad to mind yer p's and q's when yer come 'ome, eh, Jack?

O'RANE Well—yes, I did that

VORAY *pours out more beer for them both, then draws up chair to O'RANE'S side and sits.*

VORAY (*after drinking*): I 'ear as yer wife said she'd married beneath her

O'RANE (*touched on the raw*): She said that, did she? And I that good to her! Always giving her all the money I could! I never liked to think the child might be wanting for annything

VORAY Not *you*, Jack! You're too kind-'earted But I don't suppose 'er mother let much of Mary's love come to 'er dad—you being away so much, and her thinking she'd married beneath 'er!

O'RANE *sits frowning down into his glass . . .*

NO ROOM AT THE INN

(*Patting his knee*) Ah—I know, Jack Needn't tell *me* what you 'ad to put up with

Re-enter MARY

MARY The five minutes are up, Daddy!

VORAY Been counting the minutes on yer mum's watch, ducks? Yer know, it reely ain't right for a kid like you to wear a lady's watch. Playing about yer might break it

MARY I'd never break *Mummy's* watch!

VORAY Better give it to yer dad, duckie 'E'll see as it's taken good care of

MARY *looks at* VORAY, *sensing what she has in mind*

MARY No—no! I'm going to keep it always! It's *mine*!

O'RANE Well, by rights it's mine, darlint, since I gave it to yer mum

MARY But—but Mummy said I was to have it, Daddy!

O'RANE When you're grown up, maybe But as the lady says, you may break it (*Holding out his hand*) Better give it to yer dad, darlint

MARY (*uneasily*) You—you won't give it away, will you, Daddy?

O'RANE I will not!

Slowly MARY *unfastens watch from her wrist, looks at it, suddenly kisses it, then hands it to* O'RANE

MARY I'll have it back when I'm grown up, won't I, Daddy?

VORAY. What do yer expect yer dad to do with it, Miss Suspicious? Sell it?

MARY. He might—give it away

O'RANE I will *not*!

MARY May I talk to you now, Daddy?

VORAY Oh, you'll 'ave plenty of time to talk to yer dad 'E's staying 'ere for the week-end.

MARY Where's he going to sleep? You won't push us all into me——

VORAY (*quickly*). I'll look after yer dad—don't you worry! We'll nake whoopee with yer dad 'ere, won't we, ducks?

MARY *suddenly turns and walks out of the room* R

f'm! You'd think the kid 'ud be pleased, 'aving you stop 'ere in the house, wouldn't yer? Ah, she don't show yer much affection, does he?

O'RANE (*rather unhappily*). No—she does not.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY · That's her mum's doing, if you asks *me*. Hadn't I better keep that watch for yer, Jack ?

Seeing O'RANE hesitates

Can't take it with yer on a ship—wouldn't be safe You might lose it, or the ship might be torpedoed or something

O'RANE That's true

VORAY I'd take good care of it

O'RANE Well, it's the truth I've no place to keep it—(*Reluctantly hands watch to Voray*)

VORAY (*putting watch on her wrist*) A watch always goes better for wearing—d'yer know that ? Likes to be kept warm—(*dropping an eyelid*) like *men* Have some more beer ? Oh, the bottle's empty

O'RANE (*rising*) Perhaps you'll let me take you out to the local ?

VORAY Skegg's Hotel is a nice place It'll do yer good to 'ave a bit of fun after all yer 'ard times at sea

O'RANE It will that!

VORAY Want someone to make a fuss of yer I know, Jack.

Patting his arm

O'RANE (*gratefully*) You're a good sort, Aggie!

MRS VORAY *places glasses on table, then opens her bag and takes out powder-puff, mirror and lipstick and proceeds to refresh her make-up*

O'RANE (*admiringly*): Ye know—I was expecting someone quite different to you !

VORAY (*busy*). That young Mary was just telling lies about me—see ? Doesn't it crease yer ? (*Putting back make-up*) And I work meself for them kids till I'm in a state of collops! (*Holding out her hand with a seductive smile*) Well—ready ?

O'RANE (*taking her hand and drawing her to him*): I like the look of that lipstick Does it come off ?

VORAY · Try!

They kiss

Come on, now, Jack! You're in for a gay time, I promise yer! (*Goes up to door C laughing*)

O'RANE (*following her*) It's grateful I am for small mercies, and yer-self looks like a handful, darlint!

They go off C laughing Front door slams Instantly NORMA, LILY and IRENE rush in from R. LILY and IRENE hurry over to window and dive under the curtain NORMA picks up beer bottle and tilts it into her mouth

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY (*off*) Now, you kids, you be'ave yerselves! You get yer suppers and go to bed

During this MARY and RONNIE, hand in hand, enter slowly from R
We'll be back about ten

LILY (*bobbing under curtain to speak into room*) She's got Mary's watch on!

IRENE (*appearing under curtain*) Lord love a duck, he's taken her arm! He's taken her arm!

NORMA (*winking at IRENE as she puts down bottle and picks up glass*)
He gave her *wan* look!

Sucks loudly at dregs in the glass

THE CURTAIN FALLS

NO ROOM AT THE INN

Act Two : Scene I

SCENE *The Rev James Allworth's study, one morning ten days later (Only a small part of the study is shown) C a bow window In front of it a large desk covered with papers, writing materials and a telephone A swivel chair behind desk A chair to L of it Another chair down L C Other furniture as desired Door L opens upstage*

When curtain rises, MR BOWKEN, a kindly-looking, middle-aged man is sitting L of desk, his hat on his knee He looks impatiently at his watch and clicks his tongue Voices are heard off, then the door opens and KATE GRANT enters She is carrying a basket with her ration books, and a book of Masefield's Collected Poems

KATE (*speaking off as she enters*) Thanks very much I'll pop out into the hall as soon as the Vicar comes back (*The door is closed behind her*)

BOWKEN (*rising, surprised*). Oh, good morning, Miss Grant[†]

KATE : Good morning, Mr Bowken The housekeeper told me you were here, and I thought I might perhaps have a word with you while we're waiting

BOWKEN . I'm afraid I can only stay a few minutes longer, Miss Grant This is rather a busy day in the shop It's the day most of my customers come in for their rations

KATE : As it happens, I'm on my way to you for mine.

BOWKEN . Oh, yes, Miss Grant[‡] (*Looking at watch again*) I had an appointment with the Vicar for eleven It's just on half past[†]

KATE . I haven't an appointment at all I sent him a letter and thought I would follow it up.

BOWKEN : About Mary O'Rane, Miss Grant[‡]

KATE *nods*

NO ROOM AT THE INN

I guessed it! But—er—but what do you expect *the Vicar* to do about it?

KATE. Quite a lot, I hope! Did you bring the matter up at the Council meeting, Mr Bowken?

BOWKEN. Oh yes, Miss Grant! I've got a lot to tell you—quite a lot! We had a fair old row, yesterday (*Draws his shoulders up to his head*) The brickbats flew all round my head!

KATE (*sitting L C*). I suppose I ought to feel sorry for that

BOWKEN (*sitting*). Well—no. No, I wouldn't say that, Miss Grant. When I know something's wrong, then I do my best to set it right. If I *can*! And I don't mind telling you I've been very greatly worried since I heard what you told me about Mary O'Rane. As I told you, I knew her mother. She was one of my customers.

KATE. That does give you a personal interest.

BOWKEN. That wasn't necessary, Miss Grant. What you told me was quite enough for me to try to do something.

KATE (*eagerly*). And have you been able to do something, Mr Bowken?

BOWKEN. Well—— But I'll come to that in a moment.

KATE's face falls a little

We had high words, I can tell you, I upped and out with the whole story. The Town Clerk, Mr Trustmore, and the Billeting Officer—you'd have thought I'd exploded a bombshell under their noses.

KATE. Did you say that the Town Clerk had ignored all my letters?

BOWKEN. I told them the whole story. Took them all completely by surprise. The Town Clerk *raged*. He said I ought to have given warning that I was bringing the matter up at the Council meeting.

KATE. So Mr Trustmore was quite unprepared with a reply!

BOWKEN. Didn't know what to say. Then, of course, he tried to trap me by pointing out that you had no evidence.

KATE. Evidence?

BOWKEN (*nodding*). He said all you had to go on was hearsay.

KATE. I could give them all the evidence they need! I'd confront those who knew Mary when her mother was alive with the child she is now.

BOWKEN (*suddenly dispirited*). And you'd find no one brave enough to give such evidence.

KATE. Why not?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

BOWKEN Because they'd be afraid of someone asking them why *they* didn't offer Mary a home themselves, if she was such a nice child. That for one thing. Another thing is—people are such cowards. They come to me and complain about this and that, because I'm on the Council, but if I ask them to put that complaint in writing—oh no! They don't want to cause unpleasantness!

KATE Well, this may be a free country, but really we're bound hand and foot by words. "Unpleasantness" is one. Oh, it's a wonder anything ever gets done at all! What very unpleasant people the real reformers must have been!

BOWKEN It *does* require some courage, doesn't it, Miss Grant?

KATE I won't deny it! People are already beginning to regard me as a busybody. I should have been frightened of *that* word, once upon a time, but now—now I don't care what they call me, as long as I can get Mary O'Rane out of that dreadful house.

BOWKEN Yes, but that's just the point. The Billeting Officer denies that it *is* a dreadful house, and so does the Town Clerk. You see, when he had your first letter, Mr. Trustmore sent the Sanitary Inspector along to see the place, and—well, I rather think someone had dropped a hint to the woman—there had been a thorough spring-cleaning, so the Inspector was properly fooled, one way and another.

KATE: She's a clever woman.

BOWKEN: Yes, I think she must be.

KATE: Well, now *you've* brought the matter up with them, the Council will be forced to investigate fully (*When he doesn't answer*). Oh, Mr. Bowken, you're not going to tell me that nothing can be done?

BOWKEN. You said the woman was clever, Miss Grant. You know that the girl's father spent a week-end at that house?

KATE: Yes, I told *you* that.

BOWKEN. But did you know he wrote a letter to the Billeting Officer saying he wished the child to go on living with Mrs. Voray, and that he had made financial arrangements—?

KATE *gasps*.

You see! Our hands are tied—tied completely!

KATE Oh, Lord, this *is* a blow! I didn't know the father was here, or I'd have been after him like a shot. I only found out afterwards—then it was too late. So all the sound and fury at the meeting went for nothing—ended in nothing?

BOWKEN: I wouldn't say that, Miss Grant. But I confess that when the Billeting Officer showed me that letter—well, I was stumped!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

KATE • Yes I see that Did nobody else on the Council take the matter up ?

BOWKEN I really can't say they helped very much No, I really can't say that they did You see, the chief item on the agenda was the matter of the Liddo

KATE (*dazed*) The Lid—— ? The Liddo ?

BOWKEN (*rising and going to her full of enthusiasm*) Oh, yes, We're going to have a magnificent Liddo, and that means, of course, that we've got to go ahead with our town planning Yes—the Liddo is going to bring a lot of visitors to Westnall

KATE *drops her head to hide her disappointment, and her eyes light on the book in her lap She opens it quickly at a place she has marked with an envelope*

KATE Mr Bowken, I picked up this book second-hand at Green's this morning It's the collected poems of John Masfield, and glancing through it I saw that someone had marked some lines in "The Everlasting Mercy"—someone who evidently felt just the same as I do (*Hasn'tly*) And you do I want you to read them I want you to read them aloud

BOWKEN Well, I—I can't say I'm very good at reading poetry aloud, Miss Grant

KATE : That doesn't matter It's not the poetry—it's the truth behind it

BOWKEN *pats his pockets, and finally locates his spectacles Takes them out and puts them on*

Where it's marked, Mr. Bowken

Giving him book.

BOWKEN (*taking book*) Thanks (*After a little nervous cough*)

"Lord, give to men who are old and rougher
The things that little children suffer"

Ah yes, that's very good, isn't it ?

KATE It's the next two lines Read *them* !

BOWKEN • "And let—and let keep bright and undefiled
The young years of the little child."

Closing book and handing it back to her

That's putting the whole thing in a nutshell, isn't it ? In a nutshell!

KATE (*bitterly*) In a nutshell, yes. It's too small to compete with a Liddo!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

BOWKEN Oh, come now, Miss Grant! That isn't quite fair, you know Look at all the money a Liddo will bring into the town And that's good for so many people isn't it?

KATE "Good for so many people" And an attractive child like Mary, if she grows up defiled, may bring *evil* to many people (*Suddenly.*) Mr Bowken, I'm going to carry this case further!

BOWKEN (*alarmed*) Oh, Miss Grant, I—really I think you should let the matter rest for a little Look here, I'll bring it up again at the next Council meeting, I promise you!

KATE (*looking at him keenly*) I believe you're just a bit afraid of what I may do

BOWKEN Oh, I'm sure you'll only do what is right and proper, Miss Grant

KATE I wouldn't be too sure about that, if I were you!

BOWKEN Well—please, Miss Grant, wait until after the next Council meeting

KATE And when is the next meeting?

BOWKEN Next Wednesday

KATE For a child six days is a very long time

BOWKEN Oh, I know! I know! But really nothing can be done before then

KATE (*after thinking for a moment*) Well, thank you, Mr Bowken, for what you've tried to do

BOWKEN Not at all, Miss Grant, not at all! (*Taking out his watch.*) Oh dear me, I really can't wait any longer. You are—er—you're still bent on seeing the Vicar?

KATE: Yes.

BOWKEN. Oh. Well, I must go If you like to give me your list, Miss Grant, I'll have your rations put ready for you

KATE (*handing him list and ration books*): Thank you, Mr Bowken. That's very kind of you

BOWKEN Not at all, Miss Grant! Good morning for the moment, then (*At door*) Oh—will you take marmalade or strawberry jam, Miss Grant?

KATE Strawberry jam, please.

BOWKEN Strawberry it shall be, Miss Grant.

Exit.

Confused sound of men's voices off, then the REV JAMES ALLWORTH *enters, speaking over his shoulder.*

NO ROOM AT THE INN

ALLWORTH Right! We'll have a little talk this evening, then, Mr Bowken. Good-bye!

He closes door and stares questioninglly at KATE

KATE (*rising*) Good morning, Vicar

ALLWORTH Good morning I've seen you often in church, but I'm afraid I don't know your name

KATE Grant Miss Grant You should have had a letter from me this morning

ALLWORTH (*going to desk and seeking for letter among his papers*) Oh yes—yes. I remember Do sit down, Miss Grant

KATE sits L of table and ALLWORTH sits behind desk

Now where did I——? Ah yes, here it is! (*Picks up letter, glances through it, then puts it down*) You—er—you put the case very strongly, Miss Grant

KATE I feel very strongly about it, Vicar I've told you in my letter what the child was like If you saw her now! Dirty—uncared for—coarsened in every way! Every time I see her she's more of a shock to me Small wonder! Vicar, that woman often lets a room for the night Then those five children have to sleep in one bed

ALLWORTH Five? All girls?

KATE: There's one small boy

ALLWORTH · Oh!

KATE And there's a girl, Norma Smith—she's about fourteen, and she knows rather more than is good for her

ALLWORTH Oh, dear, dear!

KATE I'm not saying she's a bad girl at heart, but she just doesn't realise the difference between good and evil

ALLWORTH I see! A most undesirable influence

KATE Yes And there's Mary—this new Mary! Why, even her vocabulary is completely different And she used to love beautiful words She loved reciting She'd often recite poems to me while we walked across the Common But now—now I find it difficult to realise that she's the same child

ALLWORTH · This dreadful business about the children sleeping together—they themselves told you about it?

KATE. Oh, they don't *tell* me things They just let things out. And they let them out in such a way that it's clear they don't see there's anything wrong in their environment—anything abnormal.

ALLWORTH Take it as a matter of course?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

KATE That's just it! That's what makes it seem so awful But to the Mary of a few weeks ago such a way of living would have been—unbelievable Only a few weeks ago! Just think of that! Think how rapidly she has deteriorated!

ALLWORTH She is a susceptible character—easily influenced?

KATE No I should never have said that

ALLWORTH But if she has deteriorated so rapidly——?

KATE Do you know what I think, Vicar? I think that when she found herself in that awful environment—*trapped*—her mind suffered a most terrible shock And you must remember that shock came directly on top of her mother's death So she was thrown completely off her balance, and her inner defences collapsed

ALLWORTH (*picking up a pencil*). And the house where she is billeted——? (*Glancing at letter*) You don't give the address in your letter What is the woman's name?

KATE • Mrs Voray

ALLWORTH *starts*

You know the woman? So you know the kind of house she keeps!

ALLWORTH (*with a faint touch of wariness*) Well, I—I can't say that I actually *know*——

KATE • I think you do I think you *do* know that house, Vicar

ALLWORTH. I've never been inside the house, and I don't know the woman

KATE But you've heard rumours!

ALLWORTH Well—yes But rumour isn't evidence

KATE *Evidence*? Would you say smoke was no evidence of fire? If you saw smoke in your house you'd be a fool if you didn't find out the cause You'd know without any other evidence that there was danger This smoke of rumour is evidence that there's danger to the House of God, in which you are a responsible servant

ALLWORTH (*with a wry smile*). I stand corrected (*Reaching for telephone*) Well, let's see what can be done about it (*Dials number*) Is that the Town Clerk's office Can I speak to Mr Trustmore? . . . Oh, that you, Trustmore? Allworth here . Oh yes, thanks very much. I'd be delighted . Wednesday? (*Consulting engagement book*) Yes, Wednesday's all right Thanks very much Now then, I rang you up about a girl named Mary O'Rane.

The TELEPHONE instantly seems to come alive, a battery of sharp, crackling sounds coming through it. ALLWORTH listens for a moment, then gives a swift glance at KATE.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

(*Embarrassed*) Er—yes That is so

The TELEPHONE rages again

(*Protesting with some small amusement*) I say—you're deafening me!

TELEPHONE subsides for a moment, then the sound mounts again

Oh! . I see! Yes Yes, of course That does alter the complexion of the case . Oh, entirely! Very good, I will! Yes, Wednesday I'll make a note of it now Thanks very much Good-bye!

He makes a note in his engagement book, then sits back and looks at KATE a little quizzically

KATE (*with a bitter smile*) I suppose Mr Trustmore has been calling me a busybody—a stirrer-up of unpleasantness!

ALLWORTH I'm afraid I can't deny that he—er—*did* suggest as much He seems quite prepared to say the same thing to your face

KATE Not a bit of it! He's afraid to meet me.

ALLWORTH Well, you do seem to have rubbed him up the wrong way!

KATE It's very easy to rub a person up the wrong way when they know they're in the wrong I've written to him three times—politely, less politely, and then not at all politely He hasn't answered any of my letters, so apparently he doesn't know what politeness is

ALLWORTH His attitude is—the father has given his consent——

KATE: The father spent a week-end in that house Knowing the kind of woman she is, I don't think he slept alone

ALLWORTH Really—such an assumption——!

KATE. It's logical He was seen reeling home drunk with that woman one night—she was in the same condition And one afternoon he was seen being led home by Mary—he was drunk, then

ALLWORTH purses his lips

Is that the kind of man to hold a child's destiny in his hands?

ALLWORTH No. Definitely not But what can we do?

KATE. You should know that better than I

ALLWORTH (*exasperated*) I—really, I don't see what I can do I'm told the place has been properly inspected——

KATE No, Vicar! You're not going to get out of it as easily as that

ALLWORTH (*indicating his papers*): Miss Grant—please—I'm a terribly busy man——!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

KATE Your business is God's business, isn't it? And this is God's business

ALLWORTH But since the father has given his written consent, the law——

KATE You can't offer the law as an excuse for not making yourself a damn' nuisance in a righteous cause!

ALLWORTH (*neatening his papers to give him time to control his temper*) Miss Grant! To *you* this is a dreadful case—and I agree with you that it is. But if you knew one-tenth of the cases I have to deal with *every day*——! Well, if you felt as passionately about them all as you do about this—you'd go mad

KATE Familiarity has brought you to the state of being—dispassionate?

ALLWORTH You feel that? Would you complain that a doctor lacked sympathy because he didn't cry over the sufferings of one of your dear ones?

KATE No But then I should know that the doctor was doing his best to make my dear one better

ALLWORTH And you think I'm not wanting to do my best?

KATE I think you're just as deaf as the others!

ALLWORTH Deaf? What do you mean, Miss Grant?

KATE (*recklessly*). "Me 'eart bleeds for the poor kid, Miss Grant, but I'm full up with summer visitors" Or—"We're planning a magnificent Liddo that'll bring a lot of money to the town" Familiar, isn't it? "*There was no room for them at the inn*"

ALLWORTH (*troubled*) Well—well, of course, people must make a living No use shutting your eyes to the fact that two and two only make four

KATE But, Vicar! You're telling us every Sunday to believe that two and two *can* make *five*!

ALLWORTH *shrugs helplessly.*

Oh, I'm sorry! But I must make you hear—even if I have to shout at you—because I'm speaking for children who cannot speak for themselves

ALLWORTH You do *not* speak to deaf ears, believe *me*!

KATE Then—then if you really can't see your way to help me, please give me some advice.

ALLWORTH Trustmore says the matter is to be brought up again at the next Council meeting.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

KATE (*shaking her head*) To *them* it will be an item on the agenda—to *me* it is the soul of a child In the end the Council will do—just nothing They are deaf through fear

ALLWORTH Fear? Nonsense! Nonsense!

KATE No, it isn't nonsense You see, it's a vicious circle enclosing a festering sore

ALLWORTH. I'm afraid I don't—

KATE. Let me try and put the matter as I see it People have refused to take in these homeless children—

ALLWORTH. Miss Grant, I really must remind you that there have been many people who've been most kind and opened their homes to evacuees On the whole their experience hasn't been too fortunate, to put it mildly Can you wonder that others, seeing that, pretend to be out when the Billeting Officer calls? It *is* understandable, isn't it, that they don't want their homes wrecked by some young hooligan—

KATE The young hooligan *might* have been turned into a decent citizen at the price of a little furniture, perhaps But when that neglected hooligan finally grows up and perhaps goes to the gallows, someone will be able to say "There but for the grace of God goes my drawing-room suite!"

ALLWORTH I'm afraid it's very hard to adopt a long term policy on behalf of someone else, when it's an immediate question of—one's drawing-room suite If *you* had been confronted by such a choice, Miss Grant—?

KATE I had no choice Our home was destroyed by enemy action—completely A British hooligan wouldn't have been quite so destructive

ALLWORTH (*preparing to dismiss her*) Well, let's hope that the Council meeting—

KATE. I do beg your forgiveness for taking up so much of your time, Vicar, but, you see, the Council won't—they *dare* not listen to me

ALLWORTH: *Dare not?*

KATE: No People were unwilling to take in these children—though there was really no excuse in the case of Mary O'Rane—so the authorities were forced to accept the only place open to them, shutting their eyes to a great many things If they felt any qualms—well, they were easily forgotten There were more important things on the agenda But now I come along and stir up trouble. If they acknowledge now that the place is unfit for children, there's going to be a terrible row. They're going to be held responsible for putting them there in the first place,

NO ROOM AT THE INN

and for leaving them there so long You see——² they're completely in that woman's hands! They dare not find fault with her now—and she knows it Well, that's the position as I see it, and I don't think the Council will even *try* to find a way out

ALLWORTH They are certainly in a very awkward position But anyway, this problem won't last much longer Most of the evacuees will have gone home

KATE But not all of them There are those who have no homes to go to, or they've been abandoned by their parents or orphaned by the war And what is to become of these little derelicts² Everybody's hoping for a good new world when the war is all over But there can't be a good world without good citizens Are the children to bring all our dreams to nothing because they've been allowed to become depraved through neglect²

ALLWORTH No, no, of course not! These little derelicts, as you call them—they'll be looked after

KATE They'll be looked after² As they're being looked after now²

ALLWORTH Oh, I know mistakes have been made——

KATE. *Terrible* mistakes!

ALLWORTH They will be rectified, Miss Grant After all, sadism is not part of our national character, and we're not apathetic when it is brought to our notice

KATE And anybody who has the courage to *bring it to your notice* will be labelled "a busybody"—"a stirrer-up of trouble"¹ Why don't you go and find things out for yourself² Your uniform would prevent people putting labels on *you* You know something about this house, then what is holding you back² Is it because you're afraid of creating unpleasantness between you and your friend, the Town Clerk²

ALLWORTH. Miss Grant, I do protest——!

KATE. I'm sorry! I didn't know I could be so fierce But your whole attitude——¹ I've brought you an actual case——

ALLWORTH: Founded largely on your own suspicions You don't allege cruelty——

KATE I allege worse—or what should be worse in *your* eyes, spiritual defilement Well, what are you going to do about it² What are you going to do about Mary O'Rane²

ALLWORTH *rests his head on his hands for a moment.*

ALLWORTH (*at last*) The father's letter stands in the way of my doing anything at the moment As far as I can see, the only thing is for the father to be persuaded to let the child be adopted. I know of

NO ROOM AT THE INN

some very nice people who are anxious to adopt a girl (*With a slight smile*) Boys are not popular, it seems

KATE (*shaking her head*) Adoption's no use Though—later, perhaps But the father may be away weeks—months—and by that time—by that time Mary may be only fit for a reformatory (*Passionately*) I want to get her out of that house in twenty-four hours—in twelve!

ALLWORTH (*slowly rising*) Then I'm very much afraid I can do nothing to help you (*Indicating his papers*) I do beg you not to think me unsympathetic If I told you about the cases I have here! One wretched girl is pregnant—only fifteen, and she's got a bad dose of V D!

KATE (*rising*) God in heaven! And with that case before you, you turn your back on a child who may—through neglect—become just such another case one of these days! I said you were deaf—I didn't realise you were a damned obstinate, blind fool! (*Suddenly ashamed of her outburst, her voice faltering*) Good morning!

She goes off quickly L Terribly worried ALLWORTH stands staring after her He sits again, picks up telephone, then slowly replaces it on its rest With a deep sigh he draws his papers towards him

END OF SCENE ONE

Act Two: Scene 2

SCENE *The same as in Act I, late afternoon some weeks later*

NORMA *is standing with her hands behind her back, trying to recite the poem she has to memorise for homework, though her thoughts are really engaged by what is happening outside the window* MARY *is sitting* L C., *prompting her from the book in her hand*

NORMA "Bring me my bow of burning gold——" (*Straining her neck to look out*) Eer-rum—gold (*Clicks her tongue*)

MARY (*coarsely*) Oh, get on with it!

NORMA Well, it's so soppy! That's why I can't get it into me head Why can't Mrs Drave give us something with a story in it (*Giggling*) Ireen's got a nice piece to learn, she says It's called "How they brought the good news to the Gents"

MARY Yer silly fathead! It's "How they brought the good news, to Ghent!"

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA Oh ² (*Sniffs*) Not my style, dearie!

MARY D'yer want me to hear yer piece, or don't yer ²

NORMA *takes two sweets wrapped in paper from a secret pocket under her skirt and hands one to MARY*

MARY Ooh! Thanks a lot!

NORMA *starts to unwrap sweet*

'Ere! Yer can't say yer piece with a sucker in yer mouth Yer jaws'll get stuck And I want to get out and find Ronnie

NORMA (*holding sweet in paper with one end unwrapped*) All right, then I'll just have a suck now and then to keep up me strength Where was I ² Ah! (*Gabbling*) "Bring me my bow of burning gold bring me my airers of desire bring me my spur—— Ho!" Ho what ²

MARY "Oh, clouds unfold——"

NORMA · Ain't it tripe ²

MARY It isn't! It's lovely! Why, it's—it's a classic!

NORMA What's a classic ²

MARY It's—Oh, *you* know what a classic is

NORMA · No, I don't And you don't, neither.

MARY Yes, I do, then A classic—well, a classic is something by a dead Englishman or a live foreigner

NORMA Sounds punk to *me*!

MARY Oh, get on!

NORMA Where was I ²

MARY "Oh, clouds unfold——"

NORMA (*after a lick*) "Ho, clouds unfold 'n bring me——" er—— What do I want 'em to bring me now ²

MARY (*sucking sweet*) · "Chariot of fire."

NORMA "Chariot of fire" Er—rum—— Ooh, old Charlie Pearson's just going along! (*Driving under curtain.*) Watcher, Chawlie! I'll be seeing yer!

MARY (*insistently*) · "I will not cease——"

NORMA (*coming out from under curtain*) What ²

MARY · "I will not cease——"

NORMA Yers But what won't I cease *from* ²

MARY "Mental strife, nor——"

NORMA: "Nor shall my sword——"

NO ROOM AT THE INN

MARY *Sword!*

NORMA "Sword sleep in my 'and—*Hand*," (*Gabbling*) "Till we have built Jerusalem in H'England's green and pleasant land" What does *that* mean? Have the Jews all over England?

MARY (*taking out her sweet and wrapping it in the paper*) I think it means everybody being happy

NORMA What, free pictures and pally-de-dances? (*Sketching an arabesque*) Whoopee!

MARY No I think it means something spiritual

NORMA (*darkly*) Ha! That's where they have you!

MARY (*cynically*) Not half, they don't! (*Hurling book at NORMA.*) Oh, take the bleeding book away! I *hate* that poem!

NORMA (*glancing out of the window*) Here's old Ma Waters coming in! You can guess what *she's* coming for—bed and breakfast and no questions!

MARY (*rising*) I'm going out to find old Ron

NORMA Why don't yer come along with me and the boys? Don't want to be everlasting playing with a soppy kid like Ronnie You are soft!

MARY I'm not, then! You call me soft again and I'll slap yer silly face And I won't have yer making fun of Ronnie, see?

NORMA Him? Slopping cry-baby!

MARY (*vehemently*) Well, you let him alone or I—I'll tear your eyes out! Get me?

NORMA (*impressed*) And I believe yer would, too! (*Sketching another arabesque*) Wish Mum 'ud get me a job as a child dancer. Might get on the films and make a fortune (*Makes an extraordinary face*) I could do that innocent baby stuff, all right, all right Don't you think I look rather like Shirley Temple? (*Raises her eyes to the sky.*)

MARY. Yes, if Shirley Temple could ever look so lousy!

NORMA (*furious*). You little cat! I'll—

MARY makes a dash for the door, slamming it behind her in NORMA'S face. NORMA throws door open, to be confronted by MRS WATERS.

NORMA (*suddenly polite and "refeened"*). Oh, good evening, Mrs. Waters

MRS WATERS (*coming in*) Mrs Voray ain't in, is she?

NORMA No, I think not Can I take a message for her?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

WATERS Oh—just tell her them people are coming Wednesday, not Thursday, will yer?

NORMA (*reverting to her usual self*) I—might

WATERS And wot yer mean by “might”, duckie?

NORMA I never does things for nothink, dearie

WATERS (*grinning*) Oh, yer don’t, don’t yer?

Opening purse and handing NORMA a coin

Here y’are, then, ducks

NORMA One penny! (*Sniffs*) Thank you for nothink!

WATERS That’s all you’ll get

NORMA I think you may feel like offering me half a crown

WATERS Wot—me?

NORMA Yes, dear There’s a lady named Miss Grant She’s always asking questions

WATERS Nothing to do with me!

NORMA My mistake! Miss Grant asked me how many people slept in this house.

WATERS Oh! Nosey parker! And wot did you say?

NORMA (*holding out her hand*) I’ll tell yer for a tanner

WATERS I’ll tell Mrs Voray about you!

NORMA Wouldn’t bother me! (*Significantly*) There’s people wants to make a stink about this house—only they don’t know how I could tell ’em Unless I’m paid to keep me trap shut

WATERS Doesn’t concern me!

NORMA (*flickering her eyelids in what she imagines to be a look of innocence*): You must take me for a sucker, dear!

WATERS • ‘Ere! This is nothink short of blackmail!

NORMA: It’s worth half a crown to you for me to hold me tongue Otherwise—next Wednesday night I’ll pop out of the house and bring back someone you’ll be sorry for

WATERS (*angrily, taking out half a crown*) • Here you are—yer foul little cat!

NORMA (*hiding coin in her secret pocket*) • O K I’ll keep me trap shut for a little while

WATERS: You’ll keep yer trap shut for good and all, d’jer ’ear me?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA Oh yes, I hear you But that's not saying I'm minding

NORMA *goes out, slamming the door after her* *Voices in passage,*
then enter MRS VORAY

WATERS I bin waiting for you, Aggie

VORAY Norma told me They want to come Wednesday 'stead of Thursday

WATERS That young Norma! She's up to mischief, if you ask me!

VORAY (*with a touch of admiring affection*) Oh, Norm's all right

WATERS Is she? Bin threatening to spill the beans!

VORAY What about?

WATERS Who sleeps 'ere—and w'en She says people are asking questions

VORAY Let 'em ask!

WATERS She says a Miss Grant——

VORAY (*scoffing*) She can't do nothink!

WATERS But if young Norma opens her mouth too wide——

VORAY And d'yer think anybody's going to believe her? She's got "liar" written all over her. Besides, I gives 'er a bob occasionally to hold 'er tongue.

WATERS And she's just bin and got 'alf a crown out of me!

VORAY (*grinning*) I'll give 'er a good 'idin' when she comes in! (*Darkly*) The other kids wouldn't dare to breathe a word.

A car door slams VORAY gives a sharp glance at the window.

Why, if it isn't old Burrells! Slip out the back way, Liz. You don't 'arf look a slut!

WATERS And so would you, if yer 'adn't got a lot of vacuees to slave for yer

VORAY Lot they do!

WATERS Poor little things! The way you put upon 'em! Me 'eart fair bleeds for 'em!

VORAY So does mine But it saves me pore feet

Double knock

Go on! Buzz off! 'Ere's me boy friend!

She pushes MRS WATERS *off R then hurries off C. to open front door*

BURRELLS (*off*) Oh, good evening, Mrs Voray!

VORAY (*off*) Good evening, Mr. Burrells. Come in, will yer?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

BURRELLS (*off*) Oh, thanks very much (*Appears in passage.*) Shan't keep you a moment (*Enters*)

VORAY (*re-entering*) Not wanting me to take in any more kids, are yer?

BURRELLS No No—er—I'm afraid there's trouble, Mrs Voray

VORAY Trouble? Yer don't say!

BURRELLS Yes The parson has been on at the Town Clerk, and the Town Clerk has been on at *me* (*With a sigh of exasperation*) They don't realise my difficulties—they really don't!

VORAY Well, and what's the matter now?

BURRELLS It seems there have been—er—rumours—

VORAY And I know where them rumours started! Trust an old maid to make a nuisance of herself if she can't get no attention any other way You know who I'm talking about—Miss Nosey-Parker Grant!

BURRELLS Yes—well—er—she's making rather a lot of fuss about Mary O'Rane

VORAY Now, look here, Mr Burrells! Did I want to take that kid? Didn't you beg me on your bended knees almost, to take that kid in because no one else 'ud 'ave 'er? Is that the truth or isn't it?

BURRELLS Yes. I don't deny it.

VORAY Well, then—?

Seeing BURRELLS still looks worried.

Oh, Mr Burrells, what are yer worrying about? (*With insinuating flattery*) You know what these old maids are! A nice-looking chap like *you*—ah, *you've* 'ad something to put up with, I bet Running after *you*, I shouldn't wonder! You not being a married man

BURRELLS (*smoothing his scanty hair, trying to see straight although he feels flattered*): Oh no, no! She—er—she certainly *is* making rather a nuisance of herself, but all the same, I have to look into the matter

VORAY (*going to window with a flick of impatience*). Look into the matter! And what more can yer expect to see? The Sanitary Inspector seemed to think I kept the kids down the drains! (*Suddenly*) Well, talk of the devil and you'll smell his breath! Here's that Miss Grant. Yers—and she's coming here! What damn sauce! I won't open the door to 'er

Double knock

I'm not going to open the door to 'er!

BURRELLS She's seen my car outside (*Sighing.*) I think you'll have to let her in

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY (*going to door*) Well, this is *your* funeral, Mr Burrells—not mine!

Goes out into passage and opens front door

KATE (*off*) May I speak to Mr Burrells for a moment?

VORAY (*off*). You can come in

Enter KATE, followed by MRS VORAY, who leaves the door open as a sign that this is to be no lengthy conference

KATE Good afternoon, Mr Burrells

BURRELLS *bows*

I went to your house and they told me you'd come here

BURRELLS (*coldly*) Oh—you wanted to see me?

KATE · Yes As a matter of fact I'm very glad I found you here I want to ask Mrs Voray a few questions—in your presence

Enter NORMA, looking like a half-wit

VORAY Now then, young Norma, you clear out!

KATE If you don't mind, I'd like her to be present, Mrs Voray I would very much like to ask *her* some questions, too

NORMA (*looking more like a half-wit than ever, but with a gleam in her eye for VORAY*) · Please can I have the coupons? And I want some money for the sweet rations

VORAY (*acknowledging the blackmail out of the corner of her eye*) Oh! (*Speaking with a great show of maternal affection, as she opens her bag and brings out coupons and a ten shilling note*) Here you are, ducks A ten bob note Get the sweeties for all of us and—(*with hopeless appeal*) bring me back some change

NORMA Yes, Mrs Voray (*Turns to go.*)

VORAY (*complacently*) Wait a minute, ducks. This lady wants to ask yer some questions

NORMA (*as though this is the first she has heard of it*) O-oh?

KATE Norma, how do you children sleep here?

NORMA Quite well, thank you.

KATE · I mean—how many in a bed and all that

NORMA All what?

VORAY (*delighted with NORMA, trying to conceal her triumph behind affected crossness*) Didn't yer 'ear wot the lady said? She asked yer how many of you kids sleep in a bed.

NORMA (*letting it dawn upon her*) Oh! Well, me and Ireen and Lily sleeps in the big room, and Mary and Ron sleeps in the little room.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

KATE Why does Mary sleep with Ronnie ?

NORMA Well, yer see, the poor kid's afraid of the dark Sometimes he screams at nights somethink awful

VORAY I've never 'eard 'im!

NORMA You've always been out at the——

VORAY (*quickly*). Oh yes, I sometimes pop in to my friend next door for a cup of tea

BURRELLS Perhaps if the boy had a nightlight, Mrs Voray—— ?

VORAY I've give the little lad a nightlight over and over again, Mr Burrells But 'e's frightened of sleepin' alone He was in the blitz, you must remember

BURRELLS Yes Yes, of course Well, Miss Grant, can there be any argument about the sleeping accommodation ?

KATE Norma, does Mrs Voray ever take in visitors ?

NORMA Reely hasn't the room, has she ?

VORAY I *could* make good money, takin' in visitors, as Mr Burrells knows, but how can I when I've got these kids wot no one else will give an 'ome to ? We're overcrowded as it is

KATE ' Well, I can help to make it a little less overcrowded I've managed to find a home for Mary O'Rane

BURRELLS No, Miss Grant, I'm afraid—no Her father wrote me a letter in which he said he was very pleased Mary had found such a happy home, and that it was his wish that she should stay here as long as Mrs Voray would keep her

KATE I know all about that, Mr Burrells But Mrs Voray complains that she's overcrowded here——

VORAY (*quickly*) Oh, I ain't *complaining* ! You didn't think I was complaining, did yer, Mr Burrells ?

BURRELLS Not at all, Mrs Voray

VORAY: And, anyway, I'm not going to let Mary go Her dad begged me on his bended knees to look after her, the pore motherless child (*An underhand thrust at Kate*) Yer see, he knew I'd been a mother, Miss Grant Do you think I'd go against his wishes when he might be dead this very minute ? Why not take Norma ?

KATE I don't think Mrs. Harper——

NORMA I wouldn't mind a bit of a change (*Scratches her head*)

KATE (*horrified*). Why are you scratching your head ?

VORAY I expect a flea jumped off the cat Norma attracts them She's funny that way

NO ROOM AT THE INN

KATE *looks at* BURRELLS, *who is confused*

Oh, children often picks things up—often picks 'em up at school

KATE (*insistently to* BURRELLS) Mr Burrells, I *must* get Mary away from this house!

VORAY (*angrily*) And wot's wrong with my 'ouse, pray? Who are *you*, I'd like to know! Yer comes forcing yerself in, and then you insults me! What do *you* know about anything? You're just a silly old maid!

KATE Because I'm unmarried doesn't mean I'm a half-wit Mr Burrells, I warn you! I'm taking Mary to Mrs Harper's Immediately

VORAY. Well! We'll see about that!

Back door slams

MARY (*off*) Never you mind, Ronnie!

KATE Mary! Mary, come in here a moment, will you?

VORAY That's right! You treat the place as though it belongs to you!

MARY, *her eyes on* VORAY, *hesitates in the doorway with* RONNIE *beside her*

KATE Mary, I want to speak to you I've got some good news for you

Holding RONNIE *by the hand, MARY enters.*

Mary dear, I promised I'd find you a nice home, didn't I?

MARY *flashes a frightened glance at* VORAY.

Well, I've found one for you. You know Mrs Harper, don't you?—and Gwennie and Bridget? Well, the little cousin has gone back, and Mrs Harper is willing to take you in for as long as you like

VORAY If you take her away—I warns yer, Miss Grant!—I'll come after 'er with a p'liceman and bring her back We got 'er dad's letter and that gives *me* the legal right, don't it, Mr Burrells?

BURRELLS (*hesitating*) Well—as to that——

VORAY. You said so yerself! You wouldn't dare to fly in the face of that letter I'd consolt my solicitors if you *did* Besides, Mr O'Rane left money for Mary's board and keep. He left it with *me*—and no one's going to get it out of me in a hurry

KATE I see So it's war to the knife?

VORAY That's for *you* to say, Miss Grant

KATE I think it's for Mary to say It doesn't matter what her father has written or said, it's Mary's happiness, her good, that is im-

NO ROOM AT THE INN

portant You'd like to go and live with Mrs Harper, wouldn't you, Mary ?

MARY (*indicating VORAY*) But—but she'll bring a policeman after me!

KATE You needn't worry about that I'll have it put right somehow You *would* like to go to Mrs Harper's, would you ?

MARY (*hope dawning*) Oh yes, *please* !

RONNIE *tugs at her hand and she looks at him quickly*

Can Ronnie come, too ?

KATE (*floored*) Well, not for a little while, I'm afraid I—I'll try and find him a nice home somewhere else It's really a matter for adoption, isn't it, Mr Burrells ?

BURRELLS. Actually, yes That is, when we've given up all hope of tracing any relatives Then again, people don't seem too keen on adopting boys, especially boys of that age

KATE Well, it oughtn't to be difficult to find someone——

MARY (*protesting*) No! No!

KATE. Don't worry about him, Mary We'll see he's all right. (*Holding out her hand*) Well—will you come ?

MARY *thinks for a moment, looking straight in front of her Then she shakes her head.*

MARY. I can't leave Ronnie Never I promised

NORMA (*clicking her tongue*) Ain't she soppy ?

A slow smile of triumph comes into MRS VORAY'S face

VORAY Well, that settles it! Now p'raps you'll leave my kids alone, Miss Grant *And get out of my 'ouse, madam* !

END OF ACT TWO

NO ROOM AT THE INN

Act Three : Scene I

SCENE *Mrs Voray's kitchen, one evening in the following February It is the night before the events in the Prologue The room looks much the same, except that the curtains are completely drawn, there is a dying fire in the grate, while armchair L C faces upstage Although the supper table is just as untidy, only one beer bottle is in evidence—on the table MRS VORAY is sitting L of table She wears her usual kind of glassy satin blouse, with the addition of a bright-coloured cardigan Her skirt has a zip fastening. She has on a very jaunty hat with a long bright feather Over the chair is an ultra-smart imitation fur coat Her handbag lies on the table She is finishing her supper, eating cheese very daintily with a knife, and occasionally sipping her beer She is in a mood of suppressed excitement, and keeps looking at Mary's watch on her wrist.*

LILY and IRENE are sitting on couch R. NORMA is sitting on the back of it, facing R MARY is standing at the table, with RONNIE beside her.

VORAY (*to MARY—not unamiably*). Oh, you shut your trap!

MARY (*persisting*). And what's become of my blue coat and my wool dress? I'm cold, I tell you

RONNIE (*moving close to VORAY*). She's cold!

VORAY Oh, you!

Pushes his face and RONNIE falls down

MARY (*with an angry look at VORAY as she helps RONNIE to his feet*). Don't you interfere, young Ron!

VORAY 'E better not! If 'e gives me any sauce I'll give 'im wot for, all right

MARY He spoke up for me like a little gentleman He said I was cold, and I *am* cold, and I want my blue coat and my wool frock.

VORAY Then want'll 'ave to be yer master!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA And that's gawd's truth, dearie!

She suddenly throws herself back between LILY and IRENE, and stretching tries to touch the floor with her finger-tips

You ought to try looking at the old girl this way up, Ron! Wouldn't be frightened of her, then Doesn't half look an old cow

VORAY (*who can stand a lot from NORMA*) Norma! You give over!

NORMA folds her arms and tries to raise herself Then with a scream, suddenly flops over on to LILY, her legs waving wildly in the air

LILY (*throwing her off*) Oh, get off me!

NORMA "Little childrern love one another!"

Smacks LILY's face

VORAY Oh, shut up! D'jer 'ear me? (*Looks at wrist-watch*)

NORMA (*having righted herself*) Nice watch you got there!

VORAY (*on the defensive*) Well, I ought to wear it—not Mary. It's a lady's watch (*Finishes beer.*)

NORMA A lady's watch? Then what's it doing on a tart like you?

VORAY. If I wasn't goin' out, young Norm, I'd give yer a good 'iding Learn yer to keep a civil tongue in yer 'ead!

NORMA Civil? If I was to tell yer what I really think of yer, you'd be burnt to a cinder, dear—burnt to a cinder!

VORAY gives her a half-amused glare, then wipes her mouth on the tablecloth, and opening her bag, takes out lipstick and makes up her mouth, watched intently by RONNIE.

VORAY (*eyeing herself in her mirror, anxiously*) Like me new 'at, Norm?

NORMA (*considering her*) Wants to be a bit more over the right eye.

VORAY (*putting lipstick down on table and pulling hat as suggested*) That more like it?

NORMA Oh—very chick!

VORAY (*still eyeing herself in mirror*) Yes—I think it suits me Ah! Me 'ole future may depend upon this 'at

NORMA Ah-ha? Meeting the boy friend tonight?

VORAY replies with a blatant wink
Making good money, ain't he?

VORAY (*with great satisfaction*) Oh—he's all right!

NORMA: Doing musicians, ain't he?

IRENE (*punching NORMA*): Munitions, you idiot!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY All this money spent on you kids' education, and you don't know "musicians" from "munitions"!

NORMA Oh, well, they both make a damn row

VORAY (*again eyeing herself in the mirror*) I likes the feather, don't you, Norm?

NORMA. Real "Chase-me-Charlie", that feather!

*With a last satisfied smirk MRS VORAY puts mirror back in her bag
Then she takes out an almost empty packet of cigarettes, and extracting
the last, lights up with a lighter Then she rises and searches
mantelpiece*

VORAY Seen a packet of fags I brought in dinner-time? Norma!

NORMA No use looking at me, dear Ain't seen 'em You must have left them in the shop

VORAY No, I never, then! I remember as clear as clear putting 'em——

NORMA Old Ma Waters was in after dinner (*Snuffs.*) Really can't trust some people!

VORAY I wouldn't trust you, young Norm! I wouldn't put it past you——

NORMA Hark! Just hark at the rain! (*With false sympathy*) And you've lost yer umberella, haven't you?

VORAY I always seems to be losin' things, these days

NORMA Yers, so do us kids, and then you turn up in a new fur coat Odd, I call it

VORAY Are you incinerating——?

NORMA Hark! Sounds like hail Now ain't that hard luck? You can't go out in that chick hat, dear That *would* ruin yer future Better put on your old "Sailor, beware"!

VORAY Oh, *damn*! I did so want to wear me new 'at tonight—something special

Looks at watch again, then quickly turns and goes off C. and can be heard rushing up the stairs

MARY (*to NORMA*) When she keeps looking at mummy's watch—makes me feel sick

NORMA. I'd get it back for you, dear, but—(*snuffs*) she sleeps with it on.

During this, RONNIE, with his back to the audience, has been busy making up his nose with MRS VORAY's lipstick

LILY Did you pinch the ole girl's cigs, Norm?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA A very interesting lesson at school today, Lil Teacher told us how the magnate draws the needle The lor of attraction, I think she called it.

IRENE Did *you* pinch the cigs, Norm?

NORMA (*winking*) I got the lor of attraction in *me*, dear Just like a magnate Funny, ain't it?

Re-enter MRS VORAY She is now wearing a sailor hat which is too small for her, making her look like an over-mature "beauty" in the last row of a fit-up revue

NORMA That's right, dear You know, I *like* you in your "Sailor, beware"!

VORAY (*petulantly, putting on her fur coat*) I wanted to wear me new 'at! I'm damn sick of this old thing!

NORMA Oh, no! Gives yer a touch of B O

VORAY (*grinning*) Don't yer mean S A ?

NORMA (*with feigned innocence*) What's S A ?

VORAY It's—never you mind!

NORMA (*opening her eyes very wide*) Like that, is it? Ooh! Then they ought to use the whole blinking arphabet!

RONNIE, *giggling, suddenly turns round with his nose reddened with lipstick.*

(*Screaming with laughter*) Ow! Look at our Ron!

VORAY (*aghast*) My lipstick!

Smacks RONNIE's face

Take that, you 'orrid little rat, you! My *lipstick*! And there's a war on!

NORMA. Now don't go upsetting yerself, dear You want to look like a rose, not a beetroot!

VORAY You get off to bed, the lot of yer! I don't want sight nor sound of yer when I comes in.

NORMA: Can I have a bob for the gas meter?

VORAY. Why?

NORMA No gas, and we got to do the washing-up.

VORAY: And you'll use the gas to wash yerselves!

NORMA. We might sit in the overn to get warm

VORAY. You'll wash up with the breakfast things. (*Glancing at watch.*) Oh, you're making me late!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA Hurry up, then, dear! Don't want to keep the boy friend wai-tin' (*Giving VORAY a look of "soppy" admiration*) Ow, I do like yer in yer "Sailor, beware"! Awful lot of A S S about it!

VORAY (*flattered in spite of scepticism*) Oh, go on with yer! (*Picking up bag*) Well, good night all! Don't let me find yer up when I comes in, 'r'else there'll be trouble

Exit R, locking back door after her

IRENE (*admuringly*) You don't half pull the old girl's leg, Noim!

NORMA That's what *you* want to do, Mary—see? When she gets nasty, just make her think of something else That's what's called "tack" Just handle her with a bit of tack, not with an 'atchet Turns the old she-bear into a sucking dove, dear Now then, you kids, buzz off! I want a nice warm bed when I comes up And for Gawd's sake wipe that stuff off yer nose, Ron—in case she comes in to kiss yer good night!

RONNIE (*eagerly*). Do I look funny with my red nose?

NORMA Well, I can't say as it makes me want to die with laughing

IRENE I think you look a scream, Ron

NORMA No No, I wouldn't say *that*. It don't go with the rest of him, see what I mean? If you don't dress up with a red nose, it looks like an act of Gawd

LILY What d'yer mean—"act of Gawd"?

NORMA That's what they calls it when something 'orruble happens, and no one'll own up

Taking new packet of cigarettes from secret pocket under her dress, she goes to fire and lights cigarette with a piece of paper she finds in the untidy hearth.

MARY (*pulling armchair round towards light, so that it now faces more towards lower corner of couch*) So you did take her cigarettes, Norma!

She takes a book with a stiff ornamental marker from under cushion and curls herself up in chair

NORMA. Didn't I tell yer I attract things like a magnet?

IRENE. Give us one, Norm!

NORMA. I don't hold with kids smoking

IRENE. I'm as old as *you*!

NORMA. Then you ought to know better!

LILY. Oh, go on! Give us one, Norm.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA Do you think I'd let you smoke a stolen cigarette? Somebody's got to look after your morals! And didn't I tell yer to buzz off to bed?

MARY (*opening her book*) Run along, Ron! I'll be up in a minute I just want to have a little read

RONNIE You won't be long, will you? Promise?

MARY I promise!

She gives him a swift smile and then becomes absorbed in her book

RONNIE *looks at her as though he is jealous of her book, then goes slowly towards door C*

RONNIE Good night all

Goes out

LILY (*to NORMA*) I don't see why you should push us off to bed when we don't want to go

NORMA *takes LILY and IRENE by the shoulders and pushes them off C*

NORMA (*as she does so*) If I tell yer to go, you've got to go, see? Now then—buzz off!

She pushes them out and slams the door

Now we can have a little peace and quiet

Goes to table and sucks out remains of beer in glass, then goes to fire-place, tries to stir fire to life, then throws down poker angrily

(*Eyeing MARY.*) You're always reading that book yer mum gave you

MARY Well, there's a lot to read It's history

NORMA And what good does knowing about all them old kings and queens do anybody? Nix!

MARY I love history It takes you away from—all *this*!

Looks with distaste round the room Then she becomes absorbed in her book again, moving marker as she turns a page and so disclosing a picture on the page following

NORMA Let's have a look at that picture!

MARY You may look, but you're not to touch

NORMA Oh, all right! Keep the damn thing!

MARY (*with emphasis*) I intend to! I hide it in a different place every day.

NORMA (*grinning*): And I always know where you've hidden it!

MARY: You *would*!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA Now look here! I never takes anything from you kids, do I? And I always sticks up for yer, don't I? Your lives 'ud be a bleeding hell if it wasn't for me!

MARY (*suddenly realising it*). Yes—I think it *would*! (*By way of return*) Like to look at this picture, Norm?

NORMA (*seating herself on the arm of Mary's chair*). Who are them two kids?

MARY The little princes at the Tower

NORMA Tower picture palace?

MARY No, you fathead! You know, the Tower of London. They look very sad, don't they?

NORMA Look frightened!

MARY Well, no wonder! They were murdered by their wicked uncle.

NORMA. Oh, *I* know. The Babes in the Wood! My mum's in the panto

MARY No. These boys were murdered in the Tower. The king hired murderers to do it for him.

NORMA. Ooh! *That* sounds interesting.

MARY (*nodding*). When the little princes were asleep, the wicked murderers crept up the stairs with pillows in their hands—

NORMA. What did they have the pillows for?

MARY To kill the little princes.

NORMA. Ooh! Dirty work! But why didn't they kill them *with* a dagger?

MARY *Dagger*.

NORMA Oh, all right! Why did they kill them with pillows?

MARY Perhaps they thought it was a kind way of doing it.

NORMA (*tapping Mary on the shoulder*). It left no marks on the bodies! me, Steve? The poor victims just woke up—*dead*!

MARY. But I often sleep with my head under the pillow to keep warm, and I don't wake up dead.

NORMA Not more than usual, dearie!

MARY. Of course, the little princes were *only* boys. You couldn't ill a grown-up that way.

NORMA. Not half, you couldn't! You've only got to press *really* hard. They'd be smothered. (*Intent on picture.*) Yes—the poor little *ids* *do* look frightened, don't they?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

During this RONNIE creeps on His nose is still red, and he is wearing MRS VORAY'S new hat, with an old satin bedspread draped and tucked about him

(Suddenly seeing him) H1! Look at him! What price the little princes in the Tower! Yah!

She dashes after RONNIE who, with a shriek of delight turns and runs round the table, pursued by NORMA

MARY (urgently) Ronnie! Ronnie! Mind that hat!

Not heeding this, RONNIE runs on, then makes a dive for the couch with NORMA on top of him They struggle and scream with laughter, and presently the new hat—now looking very battered, the feather broken—falls to the floor With a cry of horror MARY throws her book down in the chair and leaps towards the hat while the struggle continues She picks up the hat and stares at it with fear in her eyes

Oh! Just look what you've done!

NORMA looks up and is immediately appalled

NORMA Gosh! We've been and broke the bleeding feather!

MARY. You did! You know you did! It wasn't Ronnie's fault

RONNIE sits staring in terror at the battered hat.

NORMA We'd better put it back upstairs

MARY That won't mend the feather!

NORMA. She's sure to come in sozzled We'll make her think *she* broke it

MARY (desperately) Can we?

NORMA (grinning as she knocks the feather). Lot of S A about that now!

RONNIE. She'll know I did it!

NORMA (*pushing down hat on Ronnie's head*): Don't you worry, me bucko! I'll say *I* broke her damn feather.

MARY (*shaking her head*): She'd believe you tried on the hat, but she'd never believe you broke the feather and—and she'll remember Ronnie's red nose.

RONNIE (*his fear growing*). Ooh!

NORMA: Now don't you worry, Ronnie!

MARY: How can he help worrying? If she puts him out in the coal-cellar—

NORMA: Well, if she does, I'll let him out. I promise, Ronnie! I'll get the key and let you out.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

MARY • And that'll be easy, if she takes the key up to bed with her!
NORMA • If she hadn't locked that back door I'd have run out and got the key.

MARY Go out the front while I see if I can mend the feather

NORMA (*hurrying off C*) Right you are!

RONNIE *sits with his hands on his knees, his mouth open, a look of sheer terror in his eyes* MARY *goes quickly to couch, kneels on the lower end, pulls open dresser drawer, brings out a very untidy-looking workbasket and turns the contents wildly over as she seeks for some means of mending feather*

MARY (*during this*) Now don't you go worrying, young Ron! And even if she does put you in the coal-cellar, we'll get you out as quick as quick She'll have forgotten all about it by tomorrow (*Finds darning needle with a length of wool in it*) Here's something! I might do something fancy If I do something fancy, she'll just think she never noticed it.

Takes hat from RONNIE's head, and putting it on arm-rest, still kneeling, tries to drive needle through the stem of the feather She keeps pushing desperately but in vain

Golly! Damn!

NORMA *re-enters C her head and shoulders sprinkled with snow*

NORMA Snowing hard!

MARY • Got the key?

NORMA 'Course not! Might have saved meself the trouble (*Looks feverishly about on mantelpiece*)

MARY I—I'm trying to mend this feather.

NORMA Where *would* she have put it? (*Suddenly recollecting*) Oh! She put it in her bag this morning after the coalman came I think she suspects I sold a pail of coal to Ma Waters

MARY Oh, dear! And I—I can't mend this feather no how!

NORMA Cripes! Just look at that poor kid's face!

MARY • Never you mind Ron's face! Just you try and think what we can do!

NORMA • What yer got the wind up for? I'll take the hat upstairs and drop it behind her dressing-table. She won't find it till the morning, and then she'll think she done it herself.

Her hand suddenly goes to her mouth in horror as MRS VORAY'S drunken singing is heard as she passes the window.

Quick! Gi'me the hat! She's coming in!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

MARY *throws hat to NORMA, but between her short aim and NORMA's excitement it falls to the ground* NORMA *rushes forward and picks it up, then dashes off with it* C *just as MRS. VORAY is heard inserting key in front door* The next moment MRS. VORAY *appears in the open doorway, her snow-drenched hair causing her to look like a Medusa* RONNIE *dashes over to far side of the room in order to put the table between him and MRS. VORAY's anger*

VORAY (*drunkenly*) Wot the hell's this? Why aren't you kids in bed?

NORMA (*sliding into room after VORAY*) See the boy friend?

VORAY (*with subdued fury, plainly lying*) No—no, I didn't. (*To RONNIE*) Wot you doin'—all dressed up?

MARY (*desperately*) I—I was just teaching him a bit of history.

VORAY (*threateningly, taking a step towards RONNIE*). 'Ist'ry? I'll learn 'im 'ist'ry! Mucking up my bedspread!

As she comes down towards him RONNIE runs round table and flying round NORMA, dashes out of the room, slamming door after him.

Her impetus causes MRS. VORAY to fall against the table.

NORMA (*taunting her*). So you didn't see yer boy friend after all?

VORAY (*turning on her*) Shut yer trap! Shurrup!

NORMA And he didn't turn up last night neither, did he?

VORAY. Wha'ssit got to do with you?

NORMA. Oh, nothink. But yer know—I think he's cooling on yer, I do reely.

VORAY. Shut yer trap, yer little——

She suddenly picks up a knife from table MARY *gives a horrified gasp.*

NORMA (*with a hysterical giggle*). Cripes! Did your boy friend ever see yer looking like that? No wonder he don't come home with yer no more!

MRS. VORAY *hurls the knife at NORMA, who manages to dash out of scullery door just in time* MARY *screams. MRS. VORAY, snivelling, collapses across chair.*

MARY (*utterly breaking down*). I can't bear it any more! I can't bear it! Oh, Mummy, Mummy, come back!

END OF SCENE I

Act Three: Scene 2

SCENE MRS VORAY'S bedroom, some two hours later.

Double bed with head against L wall, the cover that was Ronnie's "costume" put on none too tidily Chair below bed L Blacked-out window C A very littered-up dressing-table across R corner Door R Below it a washstand with a wide-mouthed ewer When scene opens the room is in darkness, save for the light that comes through the half-open door. Then stumbling footsteps are heard on the stairs, the door is thrown open, the light switched on, and MRS VORAY stands swaying in the doorway She still wears her hat, now very much awry, and her fur coat, with her bag over her arm She staggers to lower side of bed and sits, staring sightlessly in front of her

VORAY (*in maudlin self-pity*) 'E never looked at me! Never looked at me once! All becauser the rain All 'cos I wore me ole shailorat Shailor beware! Gawd pity women—tha's wot I shay (*Takes off hat and throws it backwards*) Damn shailorat! And 'e's in musicians—munish—shuns An' making goo' money! (*Throws bag on bed*) Migh' t'a fixed up wi' the beggar—'f only I knew where me bleedin' 'usban' 'ad go' to Ah well, pore old Aggie! S'all I can shay for meshelf—pore ole Aggie! N'v'mund! I'll wear me new 'at termorrer. Wear me new 'at termorrer night, and then— (*Clicking her tongue as she rises*) Ah! That'll fesh 'im, dear—that'll fesh 'im! That 'at—makes me look full of um—full of the 'ole blinkin' arphabet! (*Giggles*) Chick! (*Thinks she has hiccupped*) Pardon me! -

With a not very successful attempt to walk like a mannequin, hand on hip, she crosses to dressing-table

(*Stopped by a thought*) Why, me ole future may depend on that 'at! Makes me look—tween'y-five! (*Reaches dressing-table*) Now—w'ere did I pu' that bloomin' 'at? (*Striking head with her hand*) Where yer put yer new 'at, Aggie? I lef' it up 'ere—and I lef' it on this dressin'-table! Where is it? (*Stoops and nearly falls as she looks below table*) Mus'—mus' 'a lef' it downshtairs! (*Staggers to door*) Oh, my pore ole 'ead. Do feel so queer!

She drops down to washstand, stands holding on to it for a moment, then picks up ewer and pours out nothing

Any water? No wa'er!

As she tilts jug more completely the feather of her new hat appears

NO ROOM AT THE INN

Wo's zat ? (*Puts down jug and holds on to washstand*) Tha' was—funny Oh, I'm feelin' very queer!

She pushes over jug in the basin, then draws out hat It looks more dreadful than ever Holding on to washstand with one hand, she shakes hat with the other Suddenly she is almost sober

The feather's broke It's broke! Who broke my bleedin' feather ? I left it on the dressing-table I remember distinctly—I left-it-on-the-dressing-table *Who broke me bleedin' feather ?*

She puts hat carefully on washstand, then staggers to door, and hanging on by the handle yells

Ronnie! Ronnie! Just you come 'ere, you lil' rat

Staggers to foot of bed, swings round to glare at hat, her arms stretched along the foot

'E broke my feather I'll give 'im wot for! (*Yells louder*) Ronnie! Jus' you come 'ere, d'j'ear me ? If yer don't come, I'll come an' thrash the life outer yer! *Ronnie !*

After a moment a trembling RONNIE, wearing a girl's nightdress that has been badly cut down, appears in doorway MARY, also in her nightdress, is close behind him

(*Menacingly.*) You come in 'ere, young Ron! You come in an' shut that damn door! D'j'ear me ? Shut that damn door!

MARY, *pushing the door with her hand behind her, draws out the key.* You and me mus' 'ave a lil' talk, dear Ronnie!

MARY You're not going to touch him!

With a rush VORAY crosses to MARY, and pushing her outside, slams the door in her face

VORAY: You shan' come in! I'll lock the door

She fumbles for the key, but not finding it, rattles the handle

I'm lockin' the door, so's yer won't get in

She turns back into room, not realising that MARY is opening the door slightly behind her. She fixes her eyes threateningly on RONNIE's face, and terrified, he backs away from her down L. She fetches up at foot of bed.

Now, you lil' rat! Yer dreshed yerself up this evenin', didn't cher ? (*When he doesn't answer*) *Answer me !*

RONNIE (*scarcely above a whisper*) Yes

VORAY: Come up 'ere and got my be'spread, did'n' cher ?

RONNIE (*as before*) Yes

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY · Come in 'ere and took my be'spread, didn't yer ?

RONNIE *drops his head*

And then, you little dee-ar, yer saw my new 'at, didn't yer ? I can see by yer silly face yer did You takes my new 'at and *yer breaks the bleeding feather* !

RONNIE I never, I never !

VORAY Yah, yer lil' liar ! Yer knows yer broke the feather—yer know yer did !

MARY (*entering quickly*) · He *never* broke the feather ! I broke it

VORAY Always sticks up for 'im, don't yer ? Aren't yer shamed of yerself—lyin' to me, when I knows 'e broke my feather ?

MARY It was—it was just a game !

VORAY Oh, yers ! Like messin' up my lipstick—like takin' my be'spread ! And *then*—may Gawd fergive 'im !—'e goes and takes my new 'at and breaks the feather !

MARY (*beyond endurance*) Oh, shut up about your blasted feather !

VORAY I'll deal wi' you presently, miss ! As for 'im, may Gawd forgive 'im—I never can and I never *will* ! (*Gets round to side of bed and sits*) I feel fair upset, that I do (*Suddenly yawns*) And I'm so—so tired (*Falls back on bed mumbling*)

MARY, *after watching her for a moment, beckons to RONNIE to escape, but he stands staring at VORAY, not daring to move.*

MARY (*in an urgent whisper*) : Come on, Ron !

RONNIE *makes a sudden rush, and at that moment VORAY puts out her leg and trips him He falls to the ground and stays there cowering*

VORAY (*giggling*) Yer thought I was asleep, didn' cher ? (*Sitting up suddenly and blinking her eyes into alertness*) Well, I ain't ! (*Picks up bag and takes out a key*) Jus'—jus' gettin' up me courage to go down in the shnow—'n' lock yer in the cellar ! (*Throws bag on chair*)

RONNIE *whimpers*

MARY · You wouldn't do that ! You wouldn't dare !

VORAY Who's goin' to stop me ?

MARY · I would ! I'd—I'd *kick* you !

VORAY (*looking at MARY'S bare feet*) Woul'n' 'arf 'urt yer pore toes—if yer could get near me ! And yer'd 'ave something to yell for if yer got in *my* way !

MARY · If you lock Ronnie in the coal-cellar, I—I'll get to Mr. Burrells—I'll go to Miss Grant !

NO ROOM AT THE INN

VORAY Ternight? In the shnow? In the dark?

MARY I *would*!

VORAY Yer'd get lost! And d'yer think as anyone's goin' to take notish of *you*? Not when they 'ears wot I'll 'ave ter say termorrer!

MARY Tomorrow?

VORAY Yers! I'm goin' round to the Billetin' Officer meself termorrer I'm goin' to tell 'im as I won't 'ave that lil' rat in my 'ouse one moment longer! I've just about 'ad enough!

MARY (*hope dawning*) Then—then Ronnie and I will go away!

VORAY 'E'll go away all right! Ye-ers! 'E'll go away all right! When they 'ears wot I 'as to tell them about the stealing that goes on in this 'ouse!

MARY But that's——! (*Stops suddenly*)

VORAY That's who?

MARY (*lamely*) You—you just lose things, that's all

VORAY Just lose things, do I? I'm no fool! Didn' the kid take my lipstick? Didn' 'e take my new 'at?

MARY But—but all that—it was only in *play*!

VORAY Shows no moral shense! No moral shense at all!

Pushing RONNIE with her foot.

The lil' rat! Ah—they'll know what to do with 'im all right, when I tells 'em all the mischief 'e gets up to They'll send 'im to a reformat'ry. You'll 'ave to wear a uniform, young Ron—like a convic'. An' they'll mark yer identity card with a broad arrer An' all yer life people will know as you been to a reformat'ry! Deformat'ry, that's more like it! All yer life, son—all yer bleedin' life! (*Pointing to hat with a shaking hand, almost crying*) Jus' look what 'e's done to my new 'at! Just look at it! (*Pounces on RONNIE*) Get up! Get up, yer lil' swine!

Drags RONNIE to his feet.

MARY You're not to touch him! You're not to touch him! He'll die if you put him out there in the cold!

VORAY (*staggering to her feet*) Wha' do I care?

MARY If you put him in the coal-cellar I'll kill you!

VORAY Yah! I don't think!

Drugging RONNIE with her

Now then, you! Out of my way!

She pushes MARY so hard that she falls against the foot of the bed, and there she hangs in utter despair. RONNIE, pulled savagely by the

NO ROOM AT THE INN

arm, his eyes closed, looks as though he has already succumbed to the mysterious grown-up power that so inexplicably rules his life
He hangs upon VORAY's hand, stumbling blindly

VORAY. I'll learn yer! The 'ole bleedin' lot of yer!

She goes out, dragging RONNIE after her, and can be heard clomping down the stairs with muttered imprecations NORMA comes swiftly into the room

NORMA (*touching MARY on the shoulder*) Don't you worry, Mary! We'll get him out somehow

MARY But tomorrow—*tomorrow*! Did you hear?

NORMA Don't you worry about tomorrow! We got to get the kid out *tonight*, haven't we?

MARY (*turning on NORMA angrily*) And why didn't you come in and stop her? It'll kill him—and it was all *your* fault! Oh God, he'll die of cold!

NORMA We'll get that key and get him out!

MARY How can we get the key if she puts it in her bag? I got the key of *this* door That wouldn't open the coal-cellar, would it?

NORMA. No I've tried it before now We'll have to wait till she's asleep But—the old cat always sleeps with one ear open, in case I feel I'm suffering from night-starvation

MARY (*catching NORMA's arm*). Norma! Would she hear if—if we was to put a pillow over her head?

NORMA (*struck by the idea*) I don't believe she would! Gosh! That's the idea! Look! I'm quicker than you. (*Indicating off side of bed.*) You slip that pillow over her head while I get the key out of her bag!

MARY She wouldn't—*die*, would she?

NORMA Not her! She's got nine-lives! And you ain't got the guts
Faint sound of raucous singing comes up from below

My Gawd! Just hark at her—*singing*! It'll be *swinging* for her, if that kid dies of cold!

MARY Oh, I wish she'd come soon! (*Clasping her hands*) Dear God! Make her go off to sleep soon!

NORMA: *She's coming up!*

They slip silently out of the room MRS VORAY's stumbling footsteps are heard on the stairs, coming nearer the room Then she re-appears in the doorway She is by now almost completely "out", her head sways from side to side and she can scarcely see. She slams door behind her

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and staggers over to the bed, pulls off her fur coat and somehow manages to throw it over bed. She sits on bed for a moment, then becomes conscious that she still holds the cellar key in her hand. She blinks at it for a moment uncertainly, then picks up bag from chair and puts in key, finally putting bag on her arm. She then tears off her skirt, rises drunkenly to her feet, kicks off her shoes, drags back bedclothes and crawls into bed, dragging fur coat up about her shoulders

VORAY (mumbling) 'S' cold!

She lies on her side for a moment without moving. Then she becomes conscious that her bag prevents her bringing her arm under the covers. Then she rolls over on her left side, pauses a moment, then taking off bag, thrusts it under the pillow, the strap hanging down outside. With her arm over bag she falls asleep. After a moment her arm drops sharply, and this wakens her. She opens her eyes and blinks up at the light.

Mus' turn off—the li'——!

She jerks herself up, blinks, then drops back on to her back, her mouth fallen open, her left arm, partly bare, showing MARY'S watch. For a moment there is no sound in the room but an occasional snore. Then the door opens softly and NORMA slides into the room. She looks at the bed very warily, then turns and beckons off. She then creeps round the door to the dressing-table, feels quickly about its untidiness, then glances rather worriedly towards the door. MARY appears in doorway, and looks at NORMA, who shakes her head towards dressing-table, pointing significantly towards bed. Her eyes suddenly lighting on strap, she catches MARY'S arm in silent excitement, mouthing "There it is!" Then she indicates that MARY is to go round the other side of the bed, and mouths the word "Pillow!"

MARY creeps round upper side of the bed, while NORMA, first creeping, then dropping on her knees and crawling, makes towards the bag. For a moment MARY stands hesitating at far side of the bed, until NORMA frantically urges her by signs to pick up pillow. Having done as directed, with great care MARY gets on the bed, and there she kneels looking down at the coarse sleeping face with hatred in her eyes. Suddenly MRS VORAY emits a loud grunt, and the next moment MARY has brought the pillow down over her face. NORMA'S left hand helps to press it down, while with the other she stealthily pulls bag from under VORAY'S head. She is so intent upon what she is doing that she doesn't realise that MARY is pressing very, very hard

END OF SCENE TWO.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

Epilogue

*The Epilogue takes the play back to the end of the Prologue
As the lights go up MARY rises*

INSPECTOR . So *you're* going to tell the story, are you, my dear ?

KATE I think the real story began six months ago, Inspector It was six months ago that Mary——

INSPECTOR Ah, but I'm not interested in what happened six months ago. I want to know what happened here last night (*To MARY*) Well, my dear ?

MARY (*swallowing hard*) . It was like this, sir Mrs Voray—she put Ronnie——

NORMA (*quickly*) : Oh, don't give the old girl away, Mary!

INSPECTOR . Oh, so *you've* piped up now, have you ? Well, perhaps, as you're the eldest, *you'll* tell us what happened ?

NORMA (*pulling MARY back on to couch*) : You let *me* tell him, ducks (*Rises*)

INSPECTOR (*referring to his notebook*) Let's see! You're Norma Smith ?

NORMA (*stepping on to couch and sitting on the back*) . That's right Will me photo be in the papers ?

INSPECTOR We haven't come to that, yet! Go on!

NORMA 'Cos if me photo's in the papers, I'd like you to put down my stage name—Norma La——

INSPECTOR : Never you mind about stage names, my girl! You get on with your story

NORMA (*after a quick look at MARY*) . If I tells the truth I'll only be called a liar.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

INSPECTOR I'm a pretty good judge of the truth Just you leave it to me and get on with your story, see?

NORMA *clasps her hands in her lap and looks at the INSPECTOR with wide-eyed innocence*

NORMA You see, sir, we're all poor homeless kids as no one wants, and no one cares about

BURRELLS The authorities have done their best for you children As your guardians——

NORMA You ain't been guardian angels—not exactly—have yer?

BURRELLS *gasps*. KATE comes and sits in chair down L C

INSPECTOR And what *exactly* have you had to complain of?

BURRELLS (*trying to hide his fury*). Inspector, this girl is—not quite responsible——

INSPECTOR I want to hear what she has to say, Mr Burrells, and I'd be obliged if you didn't keep on interrupting Now, young woman, what *have* you had to complain of?

NORMA: Our morals!

INSPECTOR (*after giving her a sharp glance*) And what do you mean by that?

NORMA. You said, sir, as you had two little girls at home I pray God they may never have to live in such a sink of iniquity.

The INSPECTOR looks sharply round at BURRELLS

BURRELLS I told you, Inspector—this girl is not responsible for——

NORMA Meaning I'm bats? (*To INSPECTOR*.) He thinks I'm bats because I'm telling the *honest* truth for the first time since I entered this unhappy house.

INSPECTOR (*with a touch of scepticism*): Er—Mrs Voray—you allege she taught you to lie?

NORMA: Yes, I do 'lege that!

INSPECTOR: All of you?

LILY and IRENE: Not us!

NORMA But then, you see, sir, I'm a quick learner.

INSPECTOR: Well, if you give yourself such a bad character, I'd better question the others

NORMA (*shrugging*): Please yerself. They could only tell yer what I'm telling yer.

The INSPECTOR looks a little uncertainly from one to the other of the children, as though wondering what he is up against.

NO ROOM AT THE INN

At that moment KATE finds something at the side of her chair, discovering it to be a book. She raises the cover, reads MARY'S name, looks up with a smile, then grows suddenly tense as she sees the look of fear in MARY'S eyes as they rest on the book. (From this moment there are two sets of action, that between NORMA and the INSPECTOR, and the silent drama between MARY and KATE downstage.)

JUDITH (*seeing the INSPECTOR'S difficulty*) Inspector, Norma Smith is in my class. She is a liar, yes. But I've found out that she only lies about trivial things—never about anything serious.

INSPECTOR Well, this is serious, all right. Very serious! We'll get back to what happened last night. Did anybody come in last night?

NORMA (*mysteriously*). We don't know!

INSPECTOR You don't know?

NORMA No. You see all sorts of people came to this house when we were in bed.

INSPECTOR (*after a quick look at BURRELLS*) Oh! Like that, was it? I—see! (*Suddenly pointing to MARY*) You, my dear! You just said something about Mrs. Voray putting Ronnie somewhere—where was it?

MARY (*caught off her guard*) Out in the coal-cellar.

NORMA *looks nonplussed*

KATE (*sharply*) Last night? It was snowing hard!

INSPECTOR All right, Miss Grant. This is my business.

KATE *drops her eyes and thoughtfully plays with the book-marker*. It was a bitter night. What had the boy got on?

MARY Only—only an old nightdress.

INSPECTOR (*with an angry snort*) Oh! How long did she leave him there?

NORMA (*quickly*) He wasn't there for long.

INSPECTOR (*to MARY*) And what did she put him there for?

NORMA (*rushing in*) Because young Ron dressed up and put on her new hat and broke the feather. She wasn't half wild about it!

INSPECTOR When did she put him in the cellar?

NORMA: When she came back from the pub.

INSPECTOR Did she come back alone?

NORMA (*warily*) Well, I—I really couldn't say. We was all in bed.

INSPECTOR: And she dragged the little chap out of bed and stuck

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA That's right!

The INSPECTOR clicks his tongue, appalled

INSPECTOR That hat—where was it?

NORMA Upstairs in her room

INSPECTOR Ronnie put it back?

NORMA Yes

INSPECTOR So she found it when she went up to bed. No. I hardly think she'd shut the child out in the cold if she'd brought anyone back with her.

NORMA (*in a helping tone of voice*) But I believe she was *hoping* someone would come in. She was *singing*!

INSPECTOR (*tartly*) Well, I sing in my bath! Was she at all—lit up?

NORMA Fair sozzled!

INSPECTOR (*making a note in his book*). Then it doesn't look as though she *was* expecting anyone.

NORMA *casts an anxious look at MARY, a fact that is noted by KATE* You say the boy wasn't in the coal-cellar for long. (*Suddenly pointing at MARY*) When did she let him out?

MARY She—she was going to leave him there all night!

INSPECTOR (*alert*): Oh? Like that, was it? And who *did* let him out?

NORMA (*jumping in*): I did!

INSPECTOR. How is the coal-cellar fastened? Latch? Bolt?

NORMA. With a key.

INSPECTOR. You knew where it was kept?

NORMA: Yes. Down here.

INSPECTOR. And Mrs. Voray knew that you knew where to find it?

NORMA. Er—yes.

INSPECTOR: What was to prevent you from getting the boy out then?

NORMA. Didn't want a good hiding!

INSPECTOR. But you *did* brave a good hiding last night!

NORMA. What, leave the kid to die of cold? What *do* you take me for? Besides, the old ca—I mean, she was pretty well soused.

INSPECTOR: She was in bed, I suppose?

NORMA: You bet!—or I wouldn't have come down here, would I?

INSPECTOR: Er—no. Well, you let the boy out, and then—

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA Then I put his feet in hot water and we went to bed

INSPECTOR: And you stayed there for the rest of the night?

NORMA: Well, it wasn't exactly warm enough for a moonlight picnic, was it?

INSPECTOR: I'll say it wasn't! You heard nothing all night?

NORMA *shakes her head*

And what happened this morning?

NORMA: Well—this morning I came down, and I found the back door open!

INSPECTOR (*sharply*) You didn't lock it last night?

NORMA Couldn't 'a done, could I?

INSPECTOR You don't remember whether you locked it?

NORMA I won't tell you a lie, Inspector I don't know whether I did or I didn't

INSPECTOR: Well, under the circumstances—what else?

NORMA Lying outside the back door was Mrs Voray's bag (*With a very innocent look*) There was no money in it

INSPECTOR Where's the bag?

NORMA: On the table

The INSPECTOR hastily rises and going to table, picks up bag, then throws it down in disgust

INSPECTOR Soaked through! That's not likely to be much help (*Looking down at floor*) Nor anything else, with everybody tramping all over the place. Why didn't you tell me about that back door earlier?

NORMA Well, how did I know as you wanted to know about it?

INSPECTOR Didn't I ask you to tell me *everything*? Why didn't you mention the bag before?

NORMA (*over-confident*) And how did I know she didn't drop it when she took out the key? (*A nervous movement shows she fears an indiscretion*)

INSPECTOR (*seeing this*) What key?—Did you hear me? What key did Mrs Voray take out of her bag?

NORMA *recovers herself and looks at him with a pitying smile.*

NORMA: Why, the key of the back door, of course. She always locked it when she went off to the pub Naturally.

INSPECTOR. Did you find the back door locked when you came down to let the boy out?

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA (*brightly*) No, it wasn't—come to think of it! Why, it's plain as a pikestaff—we've had a burglar! Get me, Sherlock!

INSPECTOR (*plainly curbing a desire to hit her*). And what put the bright idea of a burglar into your head?

NORMA Well, even if I didn't *lock* the back door, I ain't such a fool as to leave it wide open on a cold winter's night!

During all this, KATE's hands have been fidgeting with the book, while she plainly tries to puzzle out the connection between it, MARY's uneasiness about her holding it, and the interrogation

INSPECTOR (*after a moment's thought*): Where did Mrs Voray usually put her bag when she went up to bed?

NORMA (*to gain time*) Pardon?

INSPECTOR Where did Mrs Voray generally put her bag when she went to bed?

NORMA Under her pillow

As KATE fidgets with the marker, the book suddenly falls open on her lap at the place where it had been inserted. A sudden gasp from MARY draws KATE's eyes to her face, then, following her stricken look, down to the picture. For a moment she is held, tense and questioning, then she covers her eyes with her hand as though to prevent MARY from realising the nature of her thoughts

During this the INSPECTOR has been making notes

INSPECTOR (*to NORMA*). How did you know Mrs Voray kept her bag under her pillow at night?

NORMA 'Cos, when she was in bed of a morning, she'd call me in to get the errands

INSPECTOR Have you noticed whether anything else is missing?

NORMA This isn't Buckin'am Palace exactly, is it?

INSPECTOR (*ignoring this*). Did she keep much money in her bag?

NORMA I wouldn't know, would I? But I *believe* she sometimes kept quite a lot.

INSPECTOR: M'm! Was anybody else likely to know she always kept her bag under her pillow?

NORMA (*leaning forward, mysteriously*). How could *we* know whose footsteps crept up the stairs at night, and crept down in the morning?

BURRELLS *gasps*

INSPECTOR: And you never looked out to see?

NORMA. Catch me!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

INSPECTOR (*suddenly*) Did any of you go into Mrs Voray's room this morning?

NORMA No, I never!

INSPECTOR (*to LILY*) Did you?

LILY No, sir

INSPECTOR (*to IRENE*) Did you?

IRENE Wake her up when she'd been on the booze? Not me!

INSPECTOR (*to MARY*) You?

MARY *shakes her head*

And the little chap?

RONNIE *shakes his head*

You see—well, we found Mrs Voray dead with a pillow—

With a stifled cry MARY falls forward. She has fainted. KATE rises swiftly, the book falling to the ground, and kneels beside MARY.

JUDITH Inspector, I protest!

INSPECTOR Get a glass of water, somebody

LILY jumps up and is about to take glass from table

Don't touch anything on that table!

LILY hurries off R

JUDITH I really must protest, Inspector! These poor children haven't had a decent meal this morning. Mary O'Rane's already fainted once

LILY returns with a dirty-looking mug of water. She comes down and offers it to KATE, who takes it with a look of disgust, then dips her fingers in the water and pats MARY's forehead.

KATE She's coming round, I think

As MARY opens her eyes

It's all right, Mary

RONNIE (*stooping to MARY, as though it is something very interesting*): You fainted!

JUDITH Can I take the children out and give them some food?

INSPECTOR: You'd better bring them something in. You know what children are! I don't want them talking.

JUDITH Very good, Inspector

BURRELLS (*quickly, taking out coins*): Better have some money!

JUDITH (*taking money*) Thanks

NO ROOM AT THE INN

INSPECTOR Why weren't the children given something to eat at school?

JUDITH Because they always come home to dinner (*Turning to go*) I'll try the British Restaurant

NORMA Try the fish-and-chip shop They're frying today

JUDITH And where is the fish-and-chip shop?

NORMA: You can't miss it Go out the back and follow your nose

JUDITH (*reprovingly*) That will be all from you, Norma For heaven's sake, do up your suspenders and wash your face and hands.

Exit R

MARY *is now sitting up, fully conscious, her head against KATE'S shoulder*

MARY (*alarm in her voice*) My book!

KATE (*speaking with disarming casualness*) Don't worry about your book, darling I'll take care of it

MARY (*insistently*). I must have it!

KATE Ronnie! I dropped Mary's book over there Pick it up for me, will you?

RONNIE *goes over and picks up book*

INSPECTOR (*with fatherly interest*) And what book's that, my dear.

MARY *flinches against KATE'S shoulder.*

KATE (*easily*) It's a lovely book her mother gave her for her birthday, and Mary doesn't like to see it kicking about on the floor

During this RONNIE hands book to KATE, who gives it to MARY

INSPECTOR. Why no, of course not! You must take care of a book like that

NORMA. Please could we go into the scullery?

INSPECTOR: Why the scullery?

NORMA. Well, we could light the gas oven and have a good warm

INSPECTOR All right Run along

BURRELLS. Yes, you go and have a nice warm, children.

NORMA (*holding out her hand to BURRELLS*). P'raps you'd give me a bob for the meter?

BURRELLS: Oh

Giving her a shilling

There you are!

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA · Thanks ever so. Come on, Ronnie!

*NORMA takes RONNIE rather forcibly by the arm and leads him off R
IRENE and LILY rush off ahead of them KATE assists MARY to rise,
and finding she is rather shaky, puts her on the couch, kneeling beside
her and dabbing her forehead with the water, but clearly listening to
what the INSPECTOR and BURRELLS are saying confidentially*

INSPECTOR This—er—this doesn't seem to have been a very desirable home for these children, Mr Burrells

BURRELLS (*belligerently*) · Well, it was the best I could do!

INSPECTOR I'm afraid there'll be some funny questions asked at the inquest Men coming and going at night——!

BURRELLS . *If you believe that girl's story——!*

INSPECTOR · The other children didn't deny it, did they?

BURRELLS · You—er—you think it was murder?

INSPECTOR (*snubbing him*) Expect me to say before the P M?

As KATE rises quickly to cover MARY

Little girl all right now, Miss Grant?

KATE · Yes, she's better But we must keep her quiet for a bit And we ought to get the children away from this house, Inspector And as soon as possible

INSPECTOR . I agree Come along, Mr Burrells—we'll see what can be done Good morning, Miss Grant (*Waving his hand to Mary*) Good-bye, my dear

Exit C

BURRELLS is about to follow the INSPECTOR, then he turns back

BURRELLS I suppose you'll never believe I did my best, Miss Grant?

KATE . I think you might have done better if you hadn't been so deaf Oh, you weren't the only one!

BURRELLS You do hate us, don't you?

KATE : I think you're still ignorant of the harm you've done.

BURRELLS : Well, I've no doubt you won't let us forget it!

KATE : It's just as well we can't read the future so far as these children are concerned. If there's a wave of juvenile crime after the war, we shan't be free from blame.

BURRELLS : You simply won't recognise our difficulties In wartime——

KATE · But this isn't just a wartime problem—our responsibility to the children

NO ROOM AT THE INN

BURRELLS (*after a moment*) I can only say I did the best I could

He turns from door C and crosses to door R mumbling
I'd better see the others are all right

He opens door R and there is the sudden rush of the sound of carefree children's voices

(*Closing door*) Well, they're all right (*As a diffident friendly gesture*)
The fish and chips have come, Mary

KATE (*sorry for him*) • Thank you, Mr Burrells. Good morning.

BURRELLS (*somewhat effusively in his gratitude*) Good morning,
Miss Grant

Exit C.

KATE Like some fish and chips, Mary? And perhaps a nice cup
of tea?

MARY • Yes, please.

KATE (*after watching MARY for a moment*) • You're not to worry,
Mary Somehow or other you're going to start a new life—a happier
life.

MARY. With Ronnie? I'll never leave Ronnie—*never!*

KATE I'll see to that. I promise! (*With careful casualness*) Oh,
Mary—I want you to let me keep that book for you for a little while.

MARY (*as though being relieved of a burden*) Oh yes! Yes, please

Gives book to KATE

KATE. I'll take great care of it (*Looking down at book*) Mary—I
think your love for Ronnie is a—a very wonderful thing.

MARY *suddenly swings her legs to the ground and stares at KATE,*
feeling, if not quite understanding, what this means

MARY • Do you?

KATE (*looking at her very steadily*): Yes, I do. And now we'll look
forward, Mary—and *never, never once look back*

She goes off quickly R. leaving door open. The next moment NORMA
rushes in and shuts the door firmly behind her MARY draws a sharp
breath as she sees NORMA, who comes slowly down and seats herself
on upper arm of couch.

NORMA: Better now, ducks?

MARY (*with an attempt to be off-hand*) I'm all right

NO ROOM AT THE INN

NORMA You're not worrying, are yer ?

After a moment MARY nods

But it was an *accident* ! We just had to get the kid out somehow, or he'd have died of cold

MARY (*strengthened by justification*) Yes ! That was it !

NORMA *rises* Then she brings out MARY'S watch from her secret pocket

NORMA (*offering it*) You can have yer watch back now, Ma'y

MARY (*after staring at it for a moment*) No. I don't want it Not now

NORMA *is putting watch on her own wrist, then stops and reluctantly removes it*

NORMA (*slowly*) No—and I don't neither And that's queer ! I've never pinched a thing before and then never wanted it I must be turning over a new leaf—eh, ducks ?

With an oddly wistful smile she looks at MARY, who nods as she blinks away her tears

THE END